The Tree in Scottish Gaelic Literature and Tradition

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The tree is one of the most enduring symbols of Gaelic literature and tradition, displaying a remarkable continuity from the earliest Old Irish sources down to the literature of Modern Scottish Gaelic. Although the many manifestations of the symbol of the tree in Gaelic literature — the *axis mundi*, the Otherworld tree, the warrior-king as tree, the forest harvest, and so on — can be ultimately traced to the universal archetype of the Tree of Life, these many forms are moulded and expressed according to the unique experiences, traditions and physical environment of Scottish Gaelic society. The literary expression of the symbol of the tree is particularly influenced by the conventions of the 'Gaelic Panegyric Code'.

This thesis is a survey of the appearances and functions of the symbol of the tree in Scottish Gaelic literature and tradition and an overview of the development of this symbol in its many contexts, literary and folkloric.

I declare that this thesis is my own work.

Michael Newton

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Abbreviations

AD — Ailean Dughalach, 1829, *Òrain, Marbhrannan agus duanagan Ghaidhealach le Ailean Dughalach.*

BA — William J. Watson, 1937, *Bàrdachd Albannach: Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore,* Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society.

BG — William J. Watson, 1959, (Third edition) *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig,* An Comunn Gàidhealach.

BL — Rev. A. MacLean Sinclair, 1898, *Na Bàird Leathanach,* vols. 1-2, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.

BSC — Colm Ó Baoill, 1972, *Bàrdachd Shìlis na Ceapaich,* Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society.

CD — William Matheson, 1970, *An Clàrsair Dall,* Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society.

CG — Alexander Carmichael, 1900-1971, (collector) *Carmina Gadelica,* 6 vols, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

CGP — William J. Watson, 1922, 'Classic Gaelic Poetry of Panegyric in Scotland', offprint from *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 29, pp. 194-234.

D — Dòmhnull MacMhuirich, 1868, (ed.) *An Duanaire,* Dùn-Eidin: Mac Lachluinn agus an Stiuartach.

DL — *Dorlach Laoidhean* [The Fernaig Manuscript], 1923, (ed.) Calum MacPhàrlain, Dundee: MacLeod.

Dw — Edward Dwelly, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary,* (reprint) 1993, Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited.

E — Raonuill Macdomhnuill, 1776, (ed.) *Comh-chruinneachaidh Òrannaigh Gàidhealach* ['The Eigg Collection'], Duneidiunn.

EB — Colm Ó Baoill, 1979, (ed.) *Eachann Bacach agus bàird eile de Chloinn Ghill-eathain,* Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society.

FFSU — Margaret Fay Shaw, 1986, (third edition) *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist,* Aberdeen University Press.

G — Eoin Gillies, 1786, (ed.) *Sean Dàin agus Òrain Ghaidhealach,* Perth.

GC — Colm Ó Baoill and Meg Bateman, 1994, (ed.) *Gàir nan Clàrsach,* Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited.

GNP — John Cameron, 1883, *The Gaelic Names of Plants,* Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons.

GSMM — James Carmichael Watson, 1934, (ed.) *Gaelic Songs of Mary MacLeod,* Glasgow: Blackie and Son Limited.

HF — John L. Campbell and Francis Collinson, 1969-1981, (ed.) *Hebridean Folksongs,* vol. 1-3, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

HSFF — John L. Campbell, 1984 (new edition), *Highland Songs of the Forty-Five,* Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society.

IBP — Osborn Bergin, 1970, *Irish Bardic Poetry,* The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

ID — Colm Ó Baoill, 1994, *Iain Dubh,* Obar-Dheathain: An Clò Gaidhealach.

LF — John F. Campbell, 1872, (ed.) *Leabhar na Féinne,* London: Spottiswoode & Co.

MC — A. and A. MacDonald, 1911, (ed.) *The MacDonald Collection of Gaelic Poetry,* Inverness: Northern Counties Newspaper and Printing and Publishing Company.

MD — Derick Thomson, 1992, (ed.) *The MacDiarmid MS Anthology,* Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society.

MWHT — John F. Campbell, 1940 and 1960, *More West Highland Tales* vols. I and II, (reprint) Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 1994.

NBT — Rev. Hector Cameron, 1932, (ed.) *Na Bàird Thirisdeach,* Stirling: The Tiree Association.

NGP — Alexander Nicolson, 1996 (new edition), (ed.) *A Collection of Gaelic Proverbs and Familiar Phrases,* Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited.

NLS MS — Manuscript in the National Library of Scotland.
ODB — Angus MacLeod, 1978, (ed.) *Òrain Dhonnchaidh Bhàin*, Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society.
OIL — Annie M. MacKenzie, 1964, (ed.) *Òrain Iain Luim*, Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society.
OLMNA — K. C. Craig, 1949, (ed.) *Òrain Luaidh Màiri Nighean Alasdair*, Glasgow.
PTWH — John F. Campbell, 1860, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, (two volume condensed edition), Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 1994.
RC — Alexander Cameron, 1894, (ed.) *Reliquaie Celticae*, volume II, Inverness: Northern Counties Newspaper and Printing and Publishing Company.
RIA — E. G. Quin, 1983, (ed.) *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy.
S — Alexander and Donald Stewart, 1804, (ed.) *Cochruinneacha Taoghta de Shaothair nam Bard Gaeleach* (The Stewart Collection), Edinburgh.
SJM — William Matheson, 1938, (ed.) *The Songs of John MacCodrum*, Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society.
SO — A. MacLeod, 1933, (ed.) *Sàr Òrain: Three Gaelic Poems*, Glasgow: An Comunn Gaidhealach.
T — Paruig Mac-An-Tuairneir, 1813, (ed.) *Comhchruinneacha do dh'orain taghta Ghaidhealach*, Duneideionn.
TGSI — *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness.*
UC — Rev. Archibald MacDonald, 1894, (ed.) *The Uist Collection*, Glasgow: Celtic Press.

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I am first of all indebted to my supervisors, Mr. Ronald Black and Professor William Gillies, for their guidance, suggestions, ideas, corrections and advice in the course of my research at every stage.

In a number of ways, this thesis builds upon earlier research done by Dr. John MacInnes and I have been fortunate enough to have been able to rely not only upon his publications but upon his constant personal contact and inspiration.

Wilson McLeod has also been kind enough to listen to my ideas, read my drafts and provide feedback at many points, and I am grateful for his many contributions to this research.

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I must thank Donald Archie MacDonald for the loan of photo-copies of the John Dewar MSS, which were not accessible in the archives of Inveraray Castle by the time that I needed to consult them.

I would like to thank the staff of the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh University Library and Glasgow University Library for their services in providing access to manuscript collections and books.

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To all and sundry, many thanks.

Introduction

Goals

The goal of my thesis is to give an account of the role of the tree in Scottish Gaelic literature and folklore.

Trees have roles to play in various aspects of the folklife of traditional Scottish Gaelic culture: at a lexical level, tree terminology carries other important associations, particularly relating to human anatomy; at a metaphorical level, the tree is a common and popular symbol for humans and the forest is the corresponding symbol for human society; as a raw resource, trees have been exploited in many aspects of life and therefore appear in many guises in many forms of popular culture; as living flora at physical locations, trees have been marked as special features in the spiritual, political and social life of Gaeldom.

In all, one can expect that the tree has made a significant impact on Gaelic consciousness. This thesis aims to deal with this theme: what is the role and significance of the tree in Scottish Gaelic culture?

Methods

Of primary importance to this thesis is the examination of original texts in Gaelic itself. The meanings and usages of the words of a language are specific to that language. Only by appreciating the semantic ranges and contexts of the words of a language can we fully appreciate the values and beliefs of the culture which uses it. The language and value system of a culture are closely interwoven with each other.

This kind of analysis is of interest to anthropologists and human ecologists who examine language to evaluate the attitudes and values embedded in it. As explained by Max Oelschlager in his great exploration of the relationship between human culture and 'wilderness', myth and language are inextricably intertwined in human consciousness:

> Myth reflects the lingering reverberations of the mysterious origins of language itself... Our modern myths live on in our world: in the way we speak about our world, calling into being those meanings which define our existence... Myths are invariably reflected in language...[1]

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[1] Max Oelschlager 1991, pp. 9-10.

The interplay and interdependence of meanings within the human mind is well illustrated by the phenomenon known as *semantic priming*. The 'interference effect' between the overlapping semantic ranges of different words has been demonstrated by psychological experiments which show that the reaction times of human subjects to word pairs which share semantic ranges are quicker, because of their mutual reinforcement, than word pairs which do not share any meanings.[2] The semantic ranges of one word are said to 'activate' fields which may be shared by other words.

This is significant in this thesis in the sense that there are many tree terms in Gaelic which have other associations as well, most notably relating to the human body and human society. Although only one sense of a word might be explicitly invoked by a text, all possible semantic fields of a word are primed by its use. This is perhaps an overly technical way of stating that by exploiting words with multiple associations, a text can imply more than it explicitly says.

Gaelic has a vast store of descriptive terms and epithets for people. Many of these terms are kennings, or have secondary meanings, which refer to the natural world. There is a very large number of 'vegetal'[3] images and tree names in Gaelic which are applied to humans in order to praise or dispraise. This store of terms, images and symbols, which appear in our very earliest Gaelic literature and have continued to be used into the 20th century, attest to a remarkable continuum of tradition. They also imply that the traditional Gaelic world-view had particular beliefs about the relationship between humankind and the natural world. An exploration into this relationship is one of the primary themes of this thesis.

Moving up from the lexical and semantic levels, this thesis makes use of a great variety of Gaelic literature, in genres such as poetry, oral narrative, proverbs and prophecy. This literature, although it does not explicitly cover the totality of the aspects of Gaelic folklife, is a vital mine of information from which much can be gleaned if read with a discerning eye.

Keith Thomas' book *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*, investigates the evolution of modern English perceptions of humankind's relationship to nature, based largely upon the contents of

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[2] Meyer and Schvaneveldt 1971, *passim*.

[3] A term I borrow from Mr. Ronald Black.

popular English literature of that era: poetry, prose, biography, religious texts, and so on. Thomas explains that these texts shed light upon aspects of cultural value and belief systems for which little other evidence exists. Thus, he explains, his research makes:

> ...use of literary sources of a kind not currently fashionable among historians. For all the defects of imaginative literature as a historical source, there is nothing to surpass it as a guide to the thoughts and feelings of at least the more articulate sections of the population.[4]

This approach is quite important when examining the Scottish Gaelic context, as older Gaelic sources very seldom give detailed accounts of an ethnographic nature as we think of them today. Although I have occasionally made use of outside observations as travellers' accounts, antiquarian writings by Gaels themselves and collections of vernacular histories, most of my early sources are in the form of songs and tales which were created by Gaels themselves for purposes other than ethnography.

Probably the most important body of evidence is that of Gaelic poetry. The bulk of pre-seventeenth century poetry that survives was the product of a learned class whose role and function was closely bound with the warrior-aristocracy. 'Highland families required a special sort of validation for the aristocratic system to work'[5] and the Gaelic poets, by reason of their status and learning, carried the necessary cultural authority in a conservative and honour-bound society. It is not until the seventeenth century that a significant amount of poetry survives that looks beyond the scope of these socio-politicial issues, such as poetry of nature or place.

Regardless of theme, however, there are consistent conventions and a common symbolic vocabulary in the body of traditional Gaelic poetry as a whole. The central importance of the bards and the influence of their works resulted in 'pervasive style [whose values]... diffused themselves throughout Gaelic poetry'[6] and which has also had an impact throughout the corpus of traditional Gaelic literature. Although this style had been recognised by earlier scholars, John MacInnes developed a systematic classification for these

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[4] Keith Thomas 1983, p. 16.
[5] William Gillies 1988, p. 245.
[6] John MacInnes 1981, p. 157.

elements in a Scottish context and coined this style the 'Gaelic Panegyric Code':

> The primary function (of bàrdachd is to be found) in clan panegyric, where the stress is on the survival of the group of warrior-hunters at the top of society. The diction is codified in sets of conventional images, most densely concentrated in the heroic elegy... The style in turn reflects an attitude to the world, which is regarded intellectually in terms of praise versus dispraise.[7]

Gaelic poets demonstrate a great interest in using metaphors, kennings, hierarchies and mnemonics patterned on the natural world and projected onto the social order. Trees represent one of these natural models, probably the most exploited biological 'class' in Nature. In terms of the Gaelic Panegyric Code, 'The kenning most commonly involved is that of the tree or forest.'[8]

Trees and the wood of trees also appear in Gaelic folklore and religious life. To be specific, trees themselves appear as revered sites, and also appear in conjunction with other sacred features of the landscape, from our earliest records. There can be little doubt that trees were a focus for spiritual and political activity in pre-Christian Scotland and that their special status lingered on well into recent times. Despite Scotland being Christian for centuries, sacred sites and local expressions of sacredness can be asborbed into a Christian ethos without destroying all traces of the pre-existing belief structure: 'Christianity has always been notable for its ability to assimilate primal religions...'.[9]

The concept of sacredness is important in the interpretation not only of sacred tree sites, but in the conceptualisation of sacred roles for social leaders and in the regulations delimiting the use of wood resources.

> The concept of sacred implies restrictions and prohibitions on human behaviour — if something is sacred then certain rules must be observed in relation to it, and this generally means that something that is said to be sacred, whether it be an object or a site (or person) must be placed apart from everyday things or places, so that its special significance can be recognized, and rules regarding it obeyed.[10]

This sense of sacred appears as taboos against defiling sacred trees, as guidelines about the appropriate use of different types of wood, as reverence

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[7] John MacInnes 1978, pp. 435-6.
[8] John MacInnes 1978, p. 458.
[9] J. P. Mackey 1992, p. 286.
[10] Jane Hubert 1994, p. 11.

afforded certain types of trees and as associations between sacred trees and social leaders.

Wood and products made of wood figure prominently in ritual activity. The type of tree that the wood is made from is often held to be very significant. Fruits, leaves, nuts and acorns also appear in aspects of Gaelic lore. It is not just that wood products are consumed by humans for human purposes — they can also be seen as mediators between humankind and the Eternal and 'barometers' of the hidden forces of nature.

Many aspects of Gaelic folklore can be readily explained in terms of the internal evidence given by Gaelic sources themselves. The record is not always so explicit and helpful however, and in such cases it is very important to widen our scope to look at cultural parallels and even human universals. I have found it useful in a number of cases to draw upon Comparative Religion, particularly as presented in the writings of Mircea Eliade. Research such as this can provide an insight into the meanings and context of beliefs and activities which are clearly ancient and primal and reappear in cultures everywhere.

Although all human cultures have particular beliefs about the role of trees in nature and their interaction with humankind, often reflecting underlying universal archetypes and motifs, each culture expresses these beliefs in its own unique manner according to its belief system as a whole. Mircea Eliade warns us in his comprehensive cross-cultural exploration into archetypes that appear in the religions of the world that a manifestation of the sacred is 'always a historical event (that is to say, always occurs in some definite situation)... not only of a certain time... but also of a certain place.'[11] While the archetypal symbol of the tree in Gaelic literature and folklore can be paralleled in many ways with other cultures, it is essential to consider it internally within the context of Gaelic culture as a whole.

Many of the aspects of tree symbolism seem to be drawn from the universal archetype of the Tree of Life (to be more fully explored in Chapter Four). As Eliade suggests, 'the tree represents — whether ritually and concretely, or in mythology and cosmology, or simply symbolically — the living cosmos, endlessly renewing itself.'[12] Aspects of 'tree cults' can be found

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[11] Mircea Eliade 1958, p. 3.
[12] Mircea Eliade 1963, p. 267.

in practically every religion known to humankind.[13] It is no surprise that even Christianity could not resist the popular imagination of human culture in the tendency to draw upon vernacular expressions of the sacred tree.

Many of the manifestations that we come across in Gaelic lore of the tree seem to refer to, and to draw from, this symbolism. Belief systems around the world have a variation of the idea that the Tree of Life is the source of life-energy, and likewise, in Gaelic cosmology, human individuals can be referred to by tree terms, have their life magically associated with the life of a particular tree, be praised in terms of tree characteristics, and so on. Just as many cultures speak of Death as 'the Reaper' or 'the Forester',[14] so too Gaelic elegies typically lament that 'our tree has been torn up from the ground.'

This thesis discusses Gaelic 'cosmology' in a number of places and contexts. I refer to cosmology in the widest possible sense to mean the belief system that a people have that explains the organisation and operation of the world,[15] its members and elements, the relationships between them and the forces that emanate from and act upon them. Cosmology in this sense is a universal fact of human consiousness, whether we speak of a Paleolithic society or of a High-Technology society. The members of all of these kinds of societies absorb beliefs, values and convictions that explain the nature of the world, whether this is by direct and explicit instruction or by implication.

The idea of the *axis mundi*, for example, the navel of the world at its centre, which can be found all over the world, presupposes that there is a discernible world and that some order and organisation can be perceived in it. This does not mean that such beliefs operated in the literal and 'objective' sense that modern science does: no one used maps or measurements to find the centre of their homeland; nor is sacredness some measurable property. A physical object which is identified with the sacred is not in and of itself a sacred thing. Such symbols are powerful and are invested with power 'because they *share* in a transcendent reality, they... *signify* that transcendent reality.'[16]

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[13] A list with examples from China, the Mediterranean and Western Europe appears in Simon Schama 1995, p. 218.

[14] Alexander Porteous 1928, pp. 39-40.

[15] This is inclusive of what we would call the Natural and Supernatural, which is indeed a distinction which many peoples do not have.

[16] Mircea Eliade 1963, p. 324.

The expressions and articulations of the members of every society are imbued with the concepts and values of the culture of that society. We may seem to be in something of a quandry when discussing the cosmology of societies such as that of the Gaelic world in the sense that written evidence is only available on account of the fact that they adopted literacy in the process of Christianisation. The written works of Gaeldom therefore are not 'purely native' but have been influenced by Biblical cosmology and the literature of the Classical world.

The adoption of Christianity does not necessarily imply, however, that all previous modes of thought and life are eclipsed and displaced. Not only did a great deal of syncreticism occur in the development of Christianity amongst the Gaels, but a number of pre-Christian beliefs and practices continued alongside Christian ones to the modern age. This is testimony not only to the resilience of culture but to the ability of Christianity to co-exist with pre-existing institutions when there is no conflict of fundamental tenets.[17]

The most common cosmological motif which appears in this thesis is that of the *axis mundi* and the cult of the centre. This is not only a topographical motif that appears in several forms, but also a motif for the organisation of human society. Another important cosmological motif which is discussed is that of the moities of noble and non-noble (sometimes with further gradations), another category which is shared between human society and the natural world. Other concepts, such as sacredness and taboos, will be encountered and discussed. It is not just that such concepts can be read into Gaelic texts, they are explicitly stated in some sources, particularly in early ones.

This thesis also probes several aspects of the relationship between Gaelic culture and landscape through the lens of tree symbolism. The first issue to resolve is the extent to which Scottish Gaelic literature simply elaborates the conventions of an idealised landscape — one often leading back to the origins of Gaelic literary conventions in Ireland — and the extent to which it 'went native', wriggled out of the literary straightjacket and provided a realistic description of a known Scottish landscape.

Another aspect concerns the attitudes and perceptions of the landscape implied in Scottish Gaelic literature, an issue discussed in some detail in

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[17] See, for example, J. P. Mackey 1992, *passim*.

Chapter Four. Given that so much of the work of the Gaelic literati is highly stylised and frequently only mentions the landscape in reference to the people that inhabit it and their social leaders, the evidence is seldom either abundant or explicit. Still, I believe that enough evidence can be gleaned from these sources to advance our understanding of this question.

In this survey I have attempted to arrange systematically the various expressions of tree symbolism that occur in Gaelic literature and tradition. Chapter One deals with the relationship between individual humans and individual trees, discussing the semantic fields of Gaelic terms, conventions and motifs in Gaelic literature and the practices in Gaelic folklife. Chapter Two deals with the relationship between groups of humans — families, clans and Gaeldom — and groups of trees, following the same lines of research as Chapter One. Chapter Three deals with trees as resources, that is, with the products of trees and the management of trees and wooden resources. Chapter Four deals with the characteristics of trees themselves as they appear in Gaelic literature and tradition, as entities and sites invested with special cultural significance.

Language and Sources

As this study focuses on the literature and traditions of Gaelic Scotland, most of the sources examined and used are in vernacular Scottish Gaelic. Poetry and long passages are first given in full in Gaelic, followed by an English translation, while short excerpts are given in Gaelic with an English translation in square brackets. I have also made use of a number of materials in Classical Gaelic of a Scottish origin or context.

I have not attempted to survey Gaelic literature more recent than the nineteenth century in any comprehensive way, but I do draw upon a few examples from the twentieth century merely to point out that many continuities can be found regarding tree symbolism. Because the influence of international literatary styles and fashions begins to move Gaelic literature in new and different directions in the twentieth century, I leave the analysis of continuities and innovations in Gaelic literature from this period onwards to a future scholar.

When Scottish Gaelic appears in text other than personal names (like Iain Lom or Donnchadh Bàn), the names of texts in footnotes (i.e., books, songs,

etc.) or common place names (such as the Gàidhealtachd [the Gaelic 'culture region'][18]), it is written in italics. Likewise, various forms of Irish (including Old Irish) are written in italics.

Following the advice of my supervisor Ronald Black, I have attempted to standardise the orthography of vernacular Scottish Gaelic texts to the modern conventions established by the CALG guidelines[19] where this has been possible, i.e., where it does not conflict with such considerations as syllable count in poetry or dialectal variations. Any significant amendations are explained in footnotes. I have translated most of the texts myself and occasionally given translations which differ from those given in original sources. Again, I explain in footnotes if I have provided a significantly different translation from that given in the original source. (The names of books and authors, and the titles of texts, have not been altered, as this might result in confusion in reference to them.)

I have made a number of compromises, however, in my attempts to modernise orthography to accommodate the needs of the language of the texts, most especially in the case of poetry. Although the CALG guidelines recommend that words be written in full and elision eschewed, it is sometimes necessary to stick with elision in poetry for the sake of syllable count. Thus, the elided forms of adjacent words are given with apostrophes marking the elided vowels: *'s a'* and *'s an*, rather than *anns a(n)*; *le'r* rather than *le ur*; etc. Possessive pronouns are often elided in poetry for the same reasons and will be indicated by an apostrophe: *chuir e 'aghaidh* rather than *chuir e a aghaidh*, etc. The *a'* form of the article can also disappear in the same way: *Is tusa 'chraobh.*

It is not always possible or desirable to change the dialectical forms of words in poetry to the modern standardised form of Gaelic. The preposition *faoi* may need to remain in this dialectical variant for the sake of rhyme and would therefore not be 'corrected' as *fo*. The *-adh* ending of most verbal nouns is omitted in some dialects of Scottish Gaelic and cannot be restored to texts without changing syllable count and stress patterns.

It has often been necessary to exploit Irish sources to clarify the context and earlier forms of cultural elements which do not appear explicitly in Gaelic Scotland, or which appear in an attenuated or fragmented form. I have not

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[18] John MacInnes 1980, p. 144.
[19] Wilson McLeod 1998, *passim.*

attempted to make an exhaustive search through Irish sources, but have made selective use of Irish materials where they complement Scottish evidence.

It should be stressed, however, that even the use of the terms 'Irish' and 'Scottish' in English can be rather complex and misleading. Recent linguistic research, for example, suggests that while Scottish dialects of Goidelic may have differences which originate in a very early period, the isogloss may be better conceptualised as Western—Eastern or Northern—Southern rather Irish—Scottish.[20] On another linguistic front, while Classical Gaelic seems to have been developed in Ireland with marked preference for 'Irish' forms of the language, this literary medium was very quickly extended within Scottish contexts.[21] While the term 'Early Irish Law' is now well established for the law system which was first recorded in Old Irish in the seventh century, it may have taken Scottish issues into account or even been extended into Scotland in such an early period as this.[22] I have tried to use the term Gaelic to refer generically to items not specifically Irish or Scottish, but generally I have not attempted to diverge entirely from the geographically-confining terminology I have inherited from previous generations of Celticists.

Most modern editions of Gaelic literature index the text according to line number and where this method of indexing is available (rather than page numbers alone), I provide references to line numbers, indicated with the abbreviation 'l.' and followed by a line number or range of line numbers. Those works which are indexed by quatrain or paragraph are referred to with the symbol '§'. A few works are indexed by columns and are referred to with the abbreviation 'col.'.

The degree to which trees permeate Gaelic tradition is reflected in the diversity and eclectic nature of the sources in which tree-related material appears. Evidence of symbolism and beliefs regarding trees may be found in poetry, oral narrative, local histories, clan histories, proverbs, folklore, and many other types of information.

I have also made use of a number of manuscript sources, most particularly the C. M. Robertson Collection in the National Library of Scotland, the J. F.

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[20] Dr. Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh, from lectures in the Department of Celtic.
[21] Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh 1998, pp. 13-4.
[22] Discussion of these matters are in Chapters One and Three.

Campbell Collection in the National Library of Scotland, the two volumes of the Neil Campbell Collection of folklore in the National Library of Scotland and the John Dewar Manuscripts.

I have not attempted any thorough examination of either material culture or archaeology, although I employ some aspects of material culture from standard reference guides (mostly I. F. Grant 1961) when relevant in discussing aspects of Gaelic folklife.

The Earliest Evidence

Scholars still disagree about origin of the word *druid* although several claims have been made connecting it with the oak tree. This was in fact an ancient etymology cited by Pliny, although this may only be due to an attempt by the Greeks to explain a Celtic word in terms of their own lexicon.[23]

There are a number of references in Classical sources linking the druids to woodland locations, although the evidence is not without ambiguity. References to oaks and woodlands only occur in texts from the time of Augustus onwards, when druids may have been forced to retreat to remote hideouts.[24] Thus Classical references to druids in woodlands may only be due to the retreat of druids to the safety of the inaccessible forest.

It is certainly significant, however, that the Indo-European root **d(v)ru-*, 'to be firm, solid, steadfast', is what gives us the words 'tree' and 'true' in English.[25] The Old Gaelic *derb* ['certain'] is a similar development. The word for the oak, *dair* in older forms of Gaelic, is also a development from this Indo-European root.

The term *druid* can be traced to an earlier form **druu̯ids*, in which the second element is 'knower' or 'seer'.[26] Linguists such as Calvert Watkins believe that the first element relates to the oak[27] (rather than to alternatives such as 'true', 'steadfast', etc.).

The iconography of archaeological artefacts offers more evidence suggesting the sacred nature of trees and woodlands. In Miranda Green's study of the religious themes in Celtic art — mostly the carvings of Gaul

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23 Nora Chadwick 1966, pp. 12-3, 34.
24 *ibid*, pp. 13, 28, 35-8.
25 Calvert Watkins 1985, p. 12.
26 Information given to me by Professor William Gillies.
27 *ibid.*

between 500 BC and 400 AD — the tree is featured with many deities and sacred symbols. She notes, for example, that the association of the tree with the Triple Mothers is probably related to the Otherworld powers of renewal, representing 'not simply fertility but the Tree of Life, which dies and is reborn every spring'.[28]

She also comments that trees appear with male deities, some of them 'local male deities, strongly attached to nature and the countryside'.[29] These male gods are sometimes hunters for whom the forest is their natural habitation, but at other times they have a direct link with the bounty of the trees themselves, grasping branches, acorns or fruits of the tree.

Tree branches and representations of trees were often ritual votive offerings. The Gundestrup cauldron, whose provenance has been a matter of great debate, depicts a branch being carried by a procession of warriors but examples of certain Celtic origin confirm the suitability of the tree as an offering to the Otherworld powers. Hazel leaves and nuts were found in the excavation of the ritual shaft at Ashill, Norfolk.[30] Whole trees or branches have been found as votive deposits in shafts in Holzhausen and Vendée.[31]

The most impressive find of a 1984 excavation of the Manching oppidum, which flourished from about the middle of the third century B.C.E. to the middle of the first, was a small ritual tree made of wood and sheet bronze. It is a highly ornate piece of fine craftsmanship, decorated with ivy leaves, fruit and berries.[32]

Some of these features do seem to appear in the oldest Gaelic sources. An Irish scribe, glossing the word *nemed*, gives the Latin *sacellum*, suggesting a small shrine or enclosure.[33] An Old Irish law tract on trees forbids the cutting of a *fidnemed* 'sacred tree'[34] and in another tract the term *dé-fhid*, which appears to mean 'god-tree', is used as a synonym of *fidnemed*.[35] That Christian churches could incorporate earlier sacred sites is suggested by the

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[28] Miranda Green 1989, p. 203. See also p. 13.
[29] *ibid*, p. 100.
[30] Anne Ross 1967, p. 54.
[31] Barry Cunliffe 1992, pp. 92-3.
[32] Sabatino Moscati *et. al.*, 1991, pp. 530-1.
[33] Thomas Charles-Edwards and Fergus Kelly 1983, p. 107.
[34] D. A. Binchy 1971, p. 157; Fergus Kelly 1997, pp. 387-8. Note that the trees are sometimes considered *nemed* in Irish law simply on account of their growing on the land of a person of *nemed* status.
[35] Thomas Charles-Edwards and Fergus Kelly 1983, p. 109.

record in the *Annals of Ulster* which states that the monastery of Armagh — its buildings and *fidnemed* — were destroyed by lightning in 996 AD.

One Old Irish text, *De Gabáil an t-Sída*, describes the Otherworld with no obvious Christian borrowings: 'Wonderful, moreover, is that land. Three trees with fruit are always there, and a pig eternally alive, and a roasted swine, and a vessel with marvellous liquor, and never are any of them exhausted.'[36] The tree appears, along with the inexhaustible cauldron and pork feast, as symbols of the bounteous paradise in the after-life.

The search for origins is enticing, but as the motif of the sacred tree can be found in all cultures, particularly the image of the Tree of Life as explained above, we should be surprised if the Gaels did not have their own expression of it. Although some scholars would see the Bible as the ultimate source of much of the symbolism of Christianised Gaeldom, we need not doubt that such beliefs and motifs already existed in the pre-Christian Gaelic world, even if they came to be harmonised with Christian ideology and eventually influenced by contact with Classical and Christian literature. Searching for the ultimate origins of such symbolism is not the aim of this thesis, but rather an exploration of the expression of these motifs in the context of Scottish Gaelic culture.

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[36] Vernam Hull 1931, p. 58.

Chapter 1

Of Trees and Human Individuals

Chapter Introduction

When considering the many-faceted role of trees in Gaelic literature and tradition, the obvious question presents itself, 'What is it about trees that have endeared them so greatly to the Gaels?' The most important factor, I believe, is that Gaeldom perceived a special kinship between humans and trees. First of all, there is the distinction of trees amongst other flora that their size and age are greater than that of other varieties of plants. Thus, they are at the top of the 'pecking order', just as humans are conceived as being uppermost in the animal world.

There are also other physical and biological characteristics that would have suggested this tree-human parallelism: height, straightness, smoothness or ruggedness and colour of bark (suggesting skin), berries and foliage (suggesting hair), sap (suggesting blood), limbs coming from a trunk, and so on.

The procreative and reproductive symbolism of trees provides a powerful metaphor for human reproduction, especially with regard to familial lineage. A notable aspect of trees which may play a part in suggesting this symbolism is the way in which every branch produces multiple descendants which resemble its 'parent', which in turn continue to reproduce in the same way.

All of these aspects, and others, can be illustrated in Gaelic sources. My discussion of human-tree relationships will begin by examining the various terms that exist in Gaelic to describe trees (at various stages of growth), limbs of trees, the fruits of trees and wooden artefacts, highlighting the manner in which these terms have alternative meanings relating to human beings. This semantic parallelism in tree terms at a lexical level, heavily exploited by the poets, is illustrative of a kinship between trees and people of which we have evidence from the earliest times in Gaelic poetry.

With this general parallelism established, it is not surprising that trees are frequently exployed as analogies or as metaphors for human characteristics or even human behaviour or emotion. That highly mobile, sentient and

expressive human beings can be compared to trees is a signal indication of the centrality of human-tree kinship in Gaelic thought.

The *bile* ('sacred tree') had a particularly important cosmological role in Gaelic culture as an *axis mundi*, connecting Heaven and Earth. The *bile* has its human counterpart in the social leader of Gaelic society who had a sacred role in connecting his people to the Otherworld powers. One aspect of this belief system is the so-called 'pathetic fallacy', the belief that the state of the social leader and his fitness to rule are made manifest in the land itself. These motifs are clearly articulated in Scottish Gaelic poetry at least into the eighteenth century.

The notion of a specific Gaelic rhetorical style utilised by the professional poets, commonly called the 'Gaelic Panegyric Code', has already been alluded to in the Introduction. Trees provide a great deal of the concrete imagery and metaphorical structure in this rhetoric and I shall discuss all of the elements of the Gaelic Panegyric Code which rely on tree terminology and symbolism. While the Gaelic Panegyric Code is typically used for praise, its conventions and symbolism can be reversed to satirise a subject.

The conventions about tree-human kinships go further than just poetic convention, however. Folkloristic evidence suggests that people believed that the life of a tree could have a strong link with the life of a human and that some people had tree ancestry or a tree-like nature attributed to them.

After having investigated these aspects of the relationships between humans and trees as they appear in various genres in Gaelic culture, I will analyse a specific song with a tree connection which has delighted audiences and evaded direct scrutiny for centuries, *Craobh nan Ubhal* [The Tree of Apples].

To what extent have the conventions associating humans and trees been extended to the part-human-part-God figure of Jesus Christ? I will look through some of the religious praise poetry in Scottish Gaelic to determine which of the elements of the Gaelic Panegyric Code have been carried into the religious realm.

The Highlands of the present day are not nearly as wooded as the conventions of Gaelic poetry might suggest and the cynic might ask if the poets were merely using clichés that meant nothing personal to them. I will try to assess when the poets were drawing their tree symbolism from personal

experience and observation and when they were merely pulling stock phrases from a catalogue.

The Vegetal Terms

The terms for 'tree' itself, often with descriptions of scent and attributes of nobility and beauty, are probably the most common tree kennings used for people. The term *cráeb* was used to mean 'branch, bough, sprig, post' in Old Irish. Although this word developed in Scottish Gaelic to mean a tree, its adjectival form *craobhach* still conveys 'branching, spreading, flowing'. The term *crann* in Old Irish (cognate with Welsh *pren*) was used to mean a tree but in modern Scottish Gaelic has come to mean 'plough; bar; tree; beam; mast' and most rod-like objects, especially those made of wood.

The R.I.A. Dictionary says that *cráeb* has secondary meanings relating to people, and scores of examples in Scottish Gaelic poetry of *craobh* and *crann* being used for human subjects can be found, such as when the bard Dòmhnall Gobha called the deceased Chisholm chieftain: *'Crann seudmhor nam buadh...* [Bejeweled wondrous tree]'.[1]

Crann and *craobh* are sometimes componded with specifics, as with *còmhrag* [battle]: *'Craobh chòmhraig ro cheud e...* [He is a tree of battle before a hundred men]'.[2]

The term *cosgair* [victory, triumph][3] is frequently compounded with *craobh* as a kenning for a warrior (sometimes appearing as *craobh-chosgarra* or *-chosgairt*):

> *Craobh chosgairt air feachd nan arm cruaidh...*[4]
> A victorious tree at the head of a troop carrying steel weapons...
>
> *A chraobh-chosgair bhuadhach àigh...*[5]
> O triumphant glorious tree of victory...

The primary meanings of *faillean* in Dwelly are 'sucker; bud; young branch, twig', and this term certainly was frequently employed to refer to

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[1] Colin Chisholm 1883, p. 222, 'Cumha an t-Siosalaich Bhàin', by Dòmhnall Gobha, 1793.
[2] *MC*, p. 75, 'Latha Raon Ruairidh'.
[3] *RIA*, col. 491.
[4] *BSC*, 'Do Fheachd Mhorair Màr', l. 252.
[5] *D*, p. 163, 'Deoch-Slàinte Mhic 'ic Alastair'. For other examples, see also: *ID*, l. 688; *MC*, p. 86; *MC*, p. 182.

humans as well: *''s tu 'd fhaillean beag bòidheach rèidh* [And you a beautiful smooth little branch]'.[6]

The term *fiùbhaidh* (< *fiodhbhadh*[7]) signifies 'timber', although it is also employed to scrutinise the 'stuff' of which people are made and to refer to a person or people:

am fiùbhaidh gasta treubhach sin...[8]
that excellent heroic wood...

am fiùbhaidh gast' aig am bheil tlachd...[9]
that excellent wood which is delightful...

am fiùbhaidh curanta ro mhòr...[10]
that enormous heroic wood...

The word *fiùran*, whose original meaning is 'sapling, branch', is now a very common term for 'blooming or handsome youth, scion',[11] and by extension any human subject worthy of praise:

Na gasain ùra, sìol nam fiùran...[12]
The young stalks, the race of the saplings...

Fiùran na cluain...[13]
The sapling of the meadow...

The term *fleasgach* is derived from *fleasg*, a wand or rod of wood, and is another common kenning from the old Gaelic period.[14] Its more archaic heroic assocations have atrophied in modern speech, but it is still a common term for young adult males in Scottish Gaelic today, for example, 'a bachelor', *seann fhleasgach* 'the best man', etc. The woman who composed the following waulking song had one such in mind: *'Fleasgach fearail ciùin eòlach...* [A calm manly wise young man...].'[15]

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[6] *EB*, 'Òran d'a Leannan', l. 1242.
[7] *HSFF*, p. 315, *'fiùbhaidh'*. Dr. Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh informs me, however, that the term *fiù* 'worth' may have also influenced the development of this word in its use as 'a worthy person'.
[8] William Matheson 1993, Track 2A8. Note *gasda* reinforcing the vegetal imagery.
[9] *NBT*, p. 42, by Bàrd Thighearna Chola.
[10] J. G. Campbell 1891, p. 126, 'Conn Mac an Deirg'.
[11] *Dw*, *'fiùran'*.
[12] *CG* II, p. 299.
[13] *GSMM* , l. 771, 'An Cròn an'.
[14] William J. Watson, in the glossary of *BG*, gives examples of *fleasg* for 'hero' from *Silva Gadelica* and *Betha Moling*.
[15] *HF* i, l. 414, 'Gura mise tha fo mhulad'.

The primary meaning of *gallan* in modern Scottish Gaelic is now 'branch, stalk', which MacBain derived from (*gas* 'sprig' + *lo* + diminitive *-án*). As can be inferred from the entry in the RIA, however, it originally referred to an upright stone or pillar and must have been extended to mean 'branch'. It is used in Scottish Gaelic poetry as an heroic kenning, and vegetal associations are certainly implied in the lines:

Thuit an gallan ùr rìomhach,
Is uile mhaise ghrad-chrìon air an fheur...[16]

The fresh beautiful stalk has fallen
And all of its beauty has suddenly withered on the grass...

The term *gas* refers to a sprig, shoot or stalk. The term *gas(an)*, originally referred to parts of the tree, has also been extended to refer to humans:

B' iomad gasan gun chealg...[17]
There was many an honourable stalk...

'S tu 'n gasan, tha eireachdail àrd...[18]
You are the stalk that is tall and fair...

The collective *gasra(i)dh* is also used to refer to groups of men or timber:

Cùm i fhèin 's a gasraidh slàn...[19]
Keep her (the boat) and her crew intact...

Chaidh an gasraidh 's an fhiùbhaidh 'nam bruan...[20]
The stalks (crew) and the timber were shattered to pieces...

David Greene has suggested that the adjective *gasta*, which is given in the Rathlin Catechism and Armstrong's Perthshire Dictionary as 'chaste', has a Latin origin in the word *castus*.[21] The term is very common in vernacular Scottish Gaelic with a superlative meaning, 'excellent; handsome; expert', which Watson has derived from the root *gas* , and thus meaning 'stalklike'.[22] Professor William Gillies has also suggested to me that the term may be a derivative of the verb *cas* [to twist or bend], and there are early examples of

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[16] *BG*, 'Marbhrann do Mhr. Seumas Beattie', l. 631-2; see also *D*, p. 10; *UC*, p. 150.
[17] *GSMM*, 'An Crònan', l. 836.
[18] *UC*, p. 150, 'Òran do Lochiall'.
[19] *SO*, 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill', l. 12.
[20] *BG*, 'Marbhrann do Mhr. Seumas Beattie', l. 638. Although the gender of the word *gasraidh* is feminine normally, it appears to have been masculine in the dialect of the author.
[21] *Ériu* 35, 1984, p. 195.
[22] *BG*, p. 369, '*gas*'.

the verb *cas* in reference to curly hair. There are also early examples of the adjective *cas* in the sense of 'intelligent, skilled.'[23] It may be that several words have come together or that a folk etymology around the 'stalk' meaning became dominant, for the vegetal associations were used by poets frequently:

> *Tha an t-òganach gasta mar ghasan de luachair...*[24]
> The expert youth is like a stalk of rushes...
>
> *Fiùran gasta deas dealbhach...*[25]
> A straight shapely stalklike branch...

The term *geug(ag)*, primarily meaning 'branch, sapling' is given by Dwelly as having as its second meaning 'young superfine female, nymph', and indeed it is the most common tree term for females: *'Mu'n ghèig ùir a dh'fhàs àlainn...* [About the fresh branch who became beautiful...].'[26]

The word *barr-gheug* is listed in Dwelly as meaning either 'Highest and most flourishing branch of a tree' or 'Tall, handsome woman.' The word *geug* is not, however, uncommon in reference to males.

The related terms *ògan* and *òganach*, originally referring to 'youth', have now come to mean 'a branch or seedling' and 'scion, young man' respectively. The similarity of these human and tree terms was exploited in Gaelic literature, as examples will demonstrate.

The term *slat* means primarily 'rod' or 'twig' of wood, though it too is used of laudable heroes, as when Màiri Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh addresses the young MacLeod:

> *Buadhach am mac / Uasal an t-slat...*[27]
> The son is endowed with talent / The stalk is noble...

The term *sonn* meant primarily 'wooden beam, post', but was used of both timbers and of people, drawing upon connotations of stability and steadfastness (as in battle).[28] The wooden origins of the term seem to have been eclipsed by later heroic associations, however.

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[23] R.I.A, p. 102, col. 80.
[24] *E*, p. 339 (from *BG*, '*gas*').
[25] *ID*, l. 575.
[26] *EB*, 'Òran Gaoil d'a Leannan agus i pòsadh ri fear eile', l. 1327.
[27] *GSMM*, 'An Crònan', l. 765-6.
[28] Glossary in *BG* for '*sonn*', *Dw*.

Och òn nach maireann na suinn...[29]
Alas that the heroes do not live...

Oscar an sonn...[30]
Oscar is the hero...

'S bho Ghleann Nodha nan sonn fearail...[31]
And from Glen Noe of the manly heroes...

The term *sonn* is the only example that I have found of a tree term of praise which is extended beyong trees and humans to be employed in the animal kingdom, for it is commonly used to describe the stag.[32]

Occasionally multiple tree kennings are used together to reinforce the imagery relating to a person:

'S tù 'n ùr-shlat àlainn 's mùirneil blàth
De'n fhiùbhaidh àrd nach crìon...[33]

You are the beautiful young rod of most joyful blossom
Made of the tall timber which does not decay...

...or to extend the tree imagery across a cross section of people:

Gur deas am fiùran / Air thùs nan gallan thu...[34]
You are an excellent branch / In the forefront of the saplings...

The ambiguity of the terms might be exploited to implicate both trees and people. This particular example also invokes the symbolism of the pathetic fallacy:

'S tu 'm fiùran deas fallain a dlùths' nan geug barraich
'S tu an t-oighre ud air fearann nan gallan 's nan crann...[35]

You are the healthy goodly branch from the dense leafy boughs
You are that heir over the land of the scions and of the branches...

Fruits of the tree

The hazel nut *cnò calltainn* was an important ingredient in the diet of the Irish where they were available[36] and there is ample evidence to demonstrate

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[29] *BG,* line 6112, 'Tuirseach Dhuinne ri Port', Alasdair MacCoinnich.
[30] John G. Campbell 1891, p. 118, 'Ailbhinn'.
[31] Derick Thomson 1996 (Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair), l. 1280, 'Smeòrach Chlann Raghnaill'.
[32] Such as in *BG,* l. 6750, 6780.
[33] *HSFF* , pp. 21-2, 'Òran do Mharcus nan Greumach agus do'n éideadh Ghàidhealach', Uilleam Ros.
[34] *ODB* , l. 5268-9, 'Òran do Iarla Bhraghaid-Albann'.
[35] *AD*, p. 125, 'Failt' an ughadair do dh'Aonghus Òg Ghlinn-garadh'.

that they were also an important resource to the Scottish Gaels. The hazel nut played a considerable role in various Gaelic myths, rituals and games. The hazel was included amongst the *Airig Fedo* [noble trees of the wood] in early Irish law tracts on account of 'its nuts and its rods'.[37] The place of the hazel in the Gaelic hierarchy will be further discussed below and the use of the nut in Chapter Three.

We should not be surprised to see the nut used as an important kenning of praise particularly emphasising the nut being from the top and not the bottom of the cluster. Fewer examples of this kenning are used in a Scottish Gaelic context than the tree-branch kenning, and they tend to be in the Classical, rather than vernacular, style:

> *a chnú thoraidh Ghaoidheal nGrég...*[38]
> O fertile nut of the Grecian Gaels...
>
> *Cnú mhullaigh a mogaill féin...*[39]
> The topmost nut of their own cluster...
>
> *Mac Mhic Cailin cnú ós crobhuing...*[40]
> The son of MacCailein is the topmost nut...
>
> *Nach bu chnò thu bhàrr bhun gèig...*[41]
> That you were not a nut from the branch's bottom...

The apple, *ubhal*, is the fruit *par excellence* of the Gael: 'It should be remembered that the apple is the ambrosial food of the Irish in all the old stories.'[42] Apples, particularly of the domesticated variety, would have been one of the only sweet substances available to people in ancient Gaeldom and must have been regarded as a delightful delicacy. Regarding the folk-tales he collected John Campbell of Islay says:

> Another magical possession is the apple. It is mentioned more frequently in Gaelic tales than in any collection which I know... whenever an apple is mentioned in Gaelic stories it has something marvellous about it...[43]

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36 Fergus Kelly 1976b, p. 109.
37 Fergus Kelly 1976b, p. 109.
38 *IBP*, p. 166, ¶ 32. 'Address to Sémas Mac Aonghuis'.
39 *BA*, l. 605, 'A Phaidrín do dhúisg mo dhéar'.
40 William J. Watson 1931, poem IV, quatrain 3.
41 *EB* , l. 1245, 'Òran d'a Leannan', by Maighstir Seathan.
42 E. C. Quiggin 1911, p. 114.
43 *PTWH* vol. 1, p. 52-5.

It should not be surprising that the apple is a very common kenning for the subject of praise, as when the widow of Gregor Mac Gregor laments her husband who has been beheaded:

Is ged tha mi gun ùbhlan agam
Is ùbhlan uile aig càch
Is ann a tha m' ubhal cùbhraidh grinn
Is cùl a chinn ri làr...[44]

Although I am without apples
While all the rest have the apples
My fragrant handsome apple
Has the back of his head to the ground...

The symbolism of the apple will be discussed in detail later.

Limbs of the tree and human body

Analogy between humans and trees may also be partly a result of, or a cause for, the use of a number of words to refer to either human limbs or tree limbs. Like the limbs branching out of the tree, small limbs (fingers and toes) emerge out of larger limbs (arms and legs) which grow out of the main trunk of the human body.

The word *geug* (discussed above) is listed in Armstrong's mid-Perthshire dictionary as capable of meaning a 'man's arms' (there is an example of this below).

The word *meur* refers primarily to the human finger or toe, but can also refer to a tree branch (as well as a branch of a family, kindred, clan, etc). These semantic ranges are exploited in the invective against Cumberland after Culloden:

Is gum bi Uilleam mac Dheòrs'
Mar chraoibh gun duilleach fo leòn
Gun mheur, gun mheangan, gun mheòirean gèige...[45]

So that George's son William will be
Like a wounded leafless tree
Without fingers, without branches, without limbs...

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[44] *BG* , l. 6479-82, 'Cumha Griogair MhicGhriogair Ghlinn Sréith'.
[45] *BG* , l. 2499-2501, 'Latha Chuil-lodair'.

It is frequently used specifically for the fingers, and this example explicitly evokes the tree associations: *'Meòir fhada mar shlat ort, fiamh daitht' air a m bàrr...* [You have long fingers like wand(s), coloured on their tips...][46]

The size and strength of the arms of the *Fianna* are emphasised by likening them to tree limbs: *'Bha am meòir mar mheòir gobhlaige, agus an gàirdeinnean mar shailean daragan-daraich* [Their fingers were like tree forks and their arms were like oak beams]'.[47]

The hero in the folktale *Cath nan Eun* [The Battle of the Birds] has to climb a tree without branches, and his extraordinary female helper fills the missing *meòir* [tree limbs or human fingers] with her own: *'Shàth i 'meur an dèidh meur, gus an d'rinn i fàradh do mhac an Rìgh gu dol suas* [She thrust limb after limb until she had made a ladder for the King's son to climb up]'.[48]

The terms *barr* and *bun* (or *bonn*) can refer, respectively, to the top and the base of things, but are used especially in reference to people and trees. When these words refer to trees, *barr* is the top of the foliage and *bun* is the trunk of the tree where the roots begin.

rath comhlán ó bharr go bun
mar chrann lomlán do thoradh...[49]

(he was) thoroughly prosperous from head to toe
like a tree full of fruit...

Soisgeul Dhè nan gràs
O do bharr gu do bhonn...[50]

The Gospel of the God of Graces
From your top to your base...

The word *dos* can mean 'bush, thicket; anything bushy', and hence is often extended to refer to human hair, as when Alasdair MacCoinnich laments his state: *'Chan iongnadh mo dhos bhith liath* [It's not surprising my locks are grey]'.[51] Hair can likewise be described with terms like *craobhach* [spreading]

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[46] *MD* , l. 208. See also *E*, p. 47, 'Òran a rinneadh le Jain Beton fear Dhuin an Eirthirich do nighean Thearlaich Òig Scalpa 'n trath'.
[47] Rev. J. MacDougall 1891, p. 75.
[48] *PTWH* vol. 1, p. 123.
[49] *BA* , l. 1977-8, 'Parrthas toraidh an Díseart'.
[50] *CG* III, p. 192, 'Soisgeul Chrìosd'.
[51] *BG*, l. 6099, 'Tuirseach Dhuinne Ri Port', Alasdair MacCoinnich.

and *duilleach* [leafy]: *''S ann air Coinneach tha 'ghruag dhuilleach* [Kenneth has the spreading, lit. leafy, hair].'[52]

The term *rùsg* refers to an external covering, most frequently the fleece of a sheep or the bark of a tree. In a Perthshire poem protesting post-Culloden injustices, the removal of the Highland Dress is likened to the stripping of bark from a tree:

> *'S e bhi sgaradh craoibh o rùsga[dh]*
> *Bhi toirt dhiùbh an earraidh mheanbh-bhric...*[53]
>
> It is (like) rendering the tree from its skin
> To be taking the tartaned garment from them...

The terms *slat* and *crann* are used most specifically for wood in Gaelic, but generally to refer to anything long and rod-like. They are thus unsurprisingly euphemisms for the penis, usually appearing in poetry in satirical and humorous contexts, as in this taunt to a piper:

> *Ged bhiodh tu 'ga sèideadh gus an èireadh do shlat*
> *Cha seinn i dhuit puirt...*[54]
>
> Even if you blew your rod until it rose
> It wouldn't play tunes for you...

An Clàrsair Dall extends the pun to the fullest in his bawdy *Fèill nan Crann* [The Fair of the rods], in which the harper's *crann* [harp key] which has been lost is sought for by a number of eager women apparently keen to find another sort of *crann*. The descriptions are ribald and outrageously funny. William Matheson suggests[55] that the tune for this song is probably the same as the bagpipe lament *Cumha Craobh nan Teud* [Lament for the Tree of Strings], revealing a connecting tree theme.

Although none of these terms are used by Iain Lom in the following satire, his use of wood imagery makes it obvious that this is what he is referring to without having to say it explicitly — the mark of an excellent artist. His antagonist has previously used a popular proverb *Cha bhi coille*

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[52] *HF* III, l. 389, 'Mhurchaidh bhig, a chinn a' chonais.'
[53] Gilleaspuig Caimbeul 1851, p. 65, 'Òran do'n Èididh Ghàidheilich'. I have emended the genitive in the second line, as the word *earradh* is masculine. The original is: '*Bhi toirt dhiùbh na h-earradh mheanbh-bhric*'.
[54] *EB* , l. 674-5, 'Ascaoin Molaidh na Pìoba'.
[55] *CD*, p. 155.

gun chrìonach [There is never a forest which lacks its rotten wood], discussed later in this thesis, against him, and Iain Lom turns this insult on him with a phallic twist:

> *Mas ann ormsa mar dhìmeas*
> *Ghabh thu choill' is a crìonach*
> *Iarr an doire nas ìsle*
> *Fo ìochdar do chlàir...*[56]
>
> If it was to be an insult to me
> That you mentioned the forest and its dead wood
> Seek the wood which is even droopier
> Under the bottom of your table...

We occasionally find names of limbs usually referring to humans and animals being applied to trees, such as when a tree was felled and described as: *'Thuit a' chraobh air a h-uileann* [The tree fell on its elbow]'.[57]

Timber and wooden items

There are many areas of the Gàidhealtachd, most notably the Outer Isles, where trees are not at all common. Tree names would largely be learnt and experienced by contact with timber and the many crucial products which had been made from wood. The process of associating wooden products with their tree sources is exemplified in a number of words: *darach* means 'oak' but is used as a by-word for 'ship'; *iubhar* means 'yew' but is commonly used (particularly in the by-form *iùbhrach*) to refer to a boat or a bow (to be further discussed in Chapter Three).

Many early weapons and boats — equipment symbolic of the role of the hero — were made of wood. The close association of the wooden implements with the warrior helps to reinforce the human-tree analogy. The many descriptive cyphers in the Irish scholarly text known as *Auraicept na nÉces* include such examples as: *'Airenach Fiann .i. fernd, air is di na sgeith* [The van of the warrior-bands, that is, alder, for shields are (made) of it];[58] *cosdad sida nin .i. uinnius, ar is di doniter craind gæ triasa coscairther in sidh* [A check on peace is ash, for spear-shafts are made of it by which the peace is broken].'[59]

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[56] *OIL*, l. 795-8, 'Dòmhnall Gruamach agus Iain Lom'.
[57] *PTWH* vol. 1, p. 185, 'Conall Cra Bhuidhe'.
[58] George Calder 1917, l. 1169.
[59] *ibid*, l. 1173-4.

Epithets for wooden weapons trigger 'semantic-priming' for the shades of meanings in words that contain heroic-vegetal connotations. It is no accident, then, that Eachann Bacach and Iain Lom use tree kennings for warrior and tree epithets for weapons side by side:

B'e siod an gasan leis 'm bu taitneach
Pìcein dathte lùbadh
An t-iubhar nuadh 'ga lughadh gu cluais:
Am beithe uat bu shiùbhlach...[60]

That was the scion who was fond of
Bending the bright coloured bow
The fresh yew being stretched to the ear
The birch (arrow) leaving you speedily...

Is iomadh òganach gleusda
Iubhar rèidh is glac throm...[61]

Many an expert youth
(with) smooth yew (bow) and loaded quiver...

Bhiodh an t-iubhar 'ga lùbadh
aig do fhleasgaichean ùra...[62]

The yew (bow) would be bent
By your young warriors...

Bha iubhair Loch Trèig aig na fiùrain nach gèilleadh...[63]
The warriors who would not yield had the yew (bows) of Loch Trèig...

In each of these cases, the bow (identified by *iubhar* [yew]) is said to be wielded by a human given a tree term (*gasan,, fleasgach, fiùran*).

In the poem by Fionnlagh Ruadh in the Book of the Dean of Lismore, the poet manages to combine both a petition for an expensive bow and a compliment to his patron with the unifying theme of *iubhar*, the by-word for 'bow' and the noblest of woods. The implication is that his patron, Mac Gregor, being made of the 'first-rate material' himself, is the most suitable candidate to provide a bow made of it:

Fada atáim gan bhogha
fhaghbháil domh is mithigh
tháinig tíom a thabhaigh
as an fhiodhraidh dhlighthigh.

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[60] *EB* , l. 308-11, 'Òran do Lachann'.
[61] *OIL* , l. 1142-3, 'Murt na Ceapaich'.
[62] *OIL* , l. 1800-10.
[63] Donald C. MacPherson 1878, p. 370, 'Latha Bhoth-loinne'.

Is é conair théighinn
d'iarraidh slaite iubhair
go flath tréan na nGaoidheal
fear nár éar lucht siubhail.[64]

I have been a long time without a bow;
it is time I got one;
the time is come to levy it
from the proper wood.

The way that I would go
to seek a rod of yew
is to the mighty prince of the Gael,
who to travellers has never made refusal.

The wood and warrior association is reinforced in poetic phrases such as *'Slat is dìrich' thu 'at uidheam* [you are the straightest rod in your armour]'.[65]

When a figure is seen coming from afar in a Fenian tale and his description is asked for, the image of the weapon-laden warrior is: *'Tha mar gum biodh coille lomain air a ghualainn* [there seems to be a forest of shields on his shoulder]'.[66]

It is not surprising that a large number of terms connected with boats, including 'boat' itself, should have tree and wood epithets, since these were constructed with timber. Tree epithets for boats and for the heroic mariner can be found intentionally placed side-by-side, such as in this depiction of the warrior as the central pole amongst the masts of his ship:

'S fiùran dìreach sheasadh suas innt'
'S cranna fada rachadh mun cuairt air...[67]

An erect (human) sapling who would stand in her
With tall masts which would surround him...

Accounts by various writers affirm that during his inauguration ceremony, a chieftain or *rìgh* 'was to receive a white rod in his hand, intimating that he had power to rule not with tyranny and partiality, but with discretion and sincerity.'[68] Although it is the colour of the rod which is

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64 *BA* , l. 1357-64.

65 *GC*, p. 170, 'Luinneag Mhic Neachdainn'.

66 John G. Campbell 1891, p. 173. The term *loman* is given in Armstrong's Perthshire Dictionary as meaning a piece of timber stripped of its bark, or a shield. Given that a shield is largely constructed of stripped timber, it is not difficult to see how the semantic range of this word was extended.

67 *GC*, p. 50, 'Iomair thusa, Choinnich Chridhe'.

68 Francis John Byrne 1973, pp. 20-1 (Byrne credits this text to Martin Martin, though Hugh MacDonald

typically emphasised in Scottish Gaelic sources, and not the tree species, we are told explicitly in the Life of St. Máedóc of Ferns that the rod in that case had to be cut from a particular hazel tree.[69]

The hazel has associations in Gaelic tradition with wisdom and Alden Watson sees the hazel rod as symbolising the source of Truth necessary for proper kingly rule, Otherworldly wisdom tapped by the poet and conferred to the king as part of his social contract: 'The king cannot either become a king or remain one unless he is imbued with the sacred wisdom which only the poet can import.'[70] The symbolism behind this sceptre may be ultimately related to the *cráeb shíde* of Old Irish tales, particularly Conchobar's silver branch,[71] discussed in more detail below.

Martin Martin tells us of the inauguration day of the young chief-to-be:

> Every heir, or young Chieftain of a Tribe, was oblig'd in Honour to give a publick Specimen of his Valour, before he was own'd and declar'd Governor or Leader of his People, who obey'd and follow'd him upon all Occasions... One of his principal Friends deliver's into his Hand the Sword wore by his Father, and there was a white Rod deliver'd to him likewise at the same time.[72]

The kenning for the chieftain in these lines by Iain Lom to Sir Ewan Cameron may be referring to the rod of chieftaincy, although the wood is *cuileann* [holly] rather than the *calltainn* [hazel]:

> *A chraobh stàilinn chruaidh chuilinn...*
> *Fhuair thu garbhbhata cuilinn*
> *Cheud là dhearbh thu bhith 'd dhuine...*[73]
>
> O steely hard branch of holly...
> You received a rough-stick of holly
> The first day you proved your manhood...

There is no reason to think that holly would not be suitable for the *slat-thighearnais* [rod of rule], for it is a hard, white wood which has been classed as noble in the Gaelic taxonomy. A number of examples discussed in further detail below will illustrate the use of the holly in the praise of Cameron of

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is the actual source). But see also Martin Martin 1716, p. 102.

[69] Francis John Byrne 1973, p. 22.

[70] Alden Watson 1981, p. 177.

[71] See Kaarina Hollo 1995, *passim*.

[72] Martin Martin 1716, pp. 101, 102.

[73] *OIL*, l. 2266, 2320-1. This is the first time, as far as I know, that anyone has inferred that this refers to the inaugural rod. It may be relevant that the term *garbh* can refer to other qualities such as military ferocity and thickness.

Lochiall, MacPhersons and MacDonald of Sleat. The white rod must have carried a great deal of symbolic importance in the ritual of Gaelic kingship, for it seems to have played a role in the inauguration of Scottish kings at least until the instalment of John Balliol in 1296.[74]

Similies and Attributal Comparisons with Trees

A further source of the human-tree correlation is the comparison of various human attributes with tree characteristics, be it skin colour, shape, smell, taste or other anthropomorphic qualities. Sims-Williams demonstrates that the metaphors that underline the human-tree correspondence are fairly universal and can be found in riddles and kennings throughout the world.[75]

Such ideas are accounted for early in the Gaelic record, as some further cryptic examples from *Auraicept na nÉces* will demonstrate: *'Li ambi ....i. ar cosmaillius a datha fri marb* [The colour of a lifeless one, i.e., owing to the resemblance of its hue to a dead person];[76] *ruamna ruice ruis* [the redness of shame is *ruis*].'[77] The analogy between shining foliage and a blazing fire is employed by *Rónán* in the Old Irish tale when he describes his son as a *'eó finn fota for lassair* [tall, fair blazing yew tree]'.[78] This is in fact the same image in the name of the Scottish Gaelic folktale heroine *Lasair Gheug*.[79]

For the sake of simplicity, I have divided examples into four categories: comparisons made on the basis of physical attributes (colour, smell, etc); comparisons relating to emotion and personality; perceived parallels or analogies between the human world and the world of trees; and metaphors and similes.

Poets frequently compare the colour of the beloved's cheek to the fruits or leaves of trees, or to trees themselves:

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74 W. D. H. Sellar 1989, p. 21, note 5.
75 Patrick Sims-Williams 1977-8, p. 113.
76 George Calder 1917, l.1170-1.
77 *ibid*, l. 1193; also 5645.
78 Patrick Sims-Williams 1977-8, p. 114.
79 Alan Bruford and Donald MacDonald 1994, tale 11. They note (p. 449) that this is probably a corruption of the favourite Irish heroine name *Lasair Fhìon-Dhearg*, and indeed there is no special tree association in the tale itself to justify the name. The fact that this tree epithet was perceived as a viable name does demonstrate, however, the ongoing dynamic of folk-etymology, which constantly drew on the stores of tree imagery.

Tha do ghruaidh cho dreachmhor
Ris na h-ùbhlan daitht' air chrann;
Sùil chorrach ghorm mar dhearcagan...[80]

Your cheek is as comely
As the colourful apples on a branch
A blue roving eye like (the) berries...

Gruaidh chorcar mar iubhar caoine...[81]
A scarlet cheek like a tender yew...

Tha do pheathraichean truagh dheth —
Neul an gruaidh' mar dhuilleag na dris'
Eadar odhar is uaine...[82]

Your sisters are poorly from it —
The shade of their cheeks like the bramble leaf
Between pale and green...

'S a barr mar bhlàth abhall ùr...[83]
And her hair like the flower of young apple trees...

These cliches are in fact so common that a Perthshire poet mocks them:

Gur e 's cleachd do luchd òran
Bhi samhlach' ròs ris gach gruaidh;
'S ma bhios bilean car bòidheach
Mar chaoran meòir iad 'n tràth buain...[84]

Songsters are in the habit
Of likening every cheek to the rose
And if lips have much beauty (they are said to be)
Like rowan berries when they are picked...

The smell or taste of the subject may also be compared with that of the fruit of the tree:

Tha d' anail cho cùbhraidh / Ri ùbhlan a' ghàraidh...[85]
Your breath is as fragrant / As the apples of the garden...

A pòg air bhlas nam peuran...[86]
Her kiss has the taste of pears...

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[80] *E*, p. 45, 'Òran le Alasdair MacCoinnich do Inghein Choinnich Ruaidh'.
[81] John G. Campbell 1891, p. 129, 'Conn Mac an Deirg'.
[82] Thomas Sinton 1906, p. 255, by Calum Dubh nam Protaigean for Uilleam Mac an Tòisich.
[83] *RC* II (Turner MS.), p. 408, 'A Chailleach do thàinig do'n Tìr'.
[84] Paul Cameron 1891, p. 133, by Dà'idh Caimbeul.
[85] *D*, p. 82, 'Tilleadh Ealaidh nan Nighean'.
[86] *CG* V, p. 118, 'Òran Sìdhe'.

The branching shape of the tree provides terminology for describing shapes of human features. This is particularly true of the term *craobh(ach)*, which connotates branches and branching beyond its strict usage with trees:

Gruag leadanach sheudach dhuilleach...[87]
Long, bejewelled, leafy hair...

Alasdair an òr-fhuilt chraoibhich...[88]
O Alasdair of the branching golden hair...

The personality or character of a person is compared with the characteristics of trees. These often involve the use of adjectives which can refer either to physical shapes or to moral qualities, such as *dìreach* [straight] and *cam* [crooked]. One folktale begins by comparing the moral qualities of nobles with the physical features of that noble tree, the *giuthas* [Scots pine]: *'Bha Rìgh ann agus bha Ridire mar a bha is mar a bhios is mar a chinneas an giuthas, cuid dheth càm 's cuid dheth dìreach...* [There was a King and a Knight, and they were, are and will be similar to the way in which the Scots pine grows, some of it crooked and some of it straight...]'.[89]

This sort of analogy is particularly common in proverbs, describing the nature of trees and wood with the intention of imparting information about people: *'Faodaidh freumhan cam a bhith aig faillean dìreach* [A straight sapling can have crooked roots]',[90] or *'Is minig a bha dreach breagh' air maide mosgain* [Many a rotten stick has a nice appearance].'[91] This seems to be the same imagery used in a *Rann Callainn* [Hogmanay rhyme] from Islay:

Thàinig mise 'nur ceann
Mar [a'] mhaide cham a bhiodh an coille;
Mas dìreach mi, cumaibh ann mi
Ach mas cam, cuiribh uaibh mi.[92]

I have come before you
Like the branch that would be sticking out in a grove
If I am straight, keep me here
But if I am crooked, send me away from you.

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[87] *CG* V, p. 20, 'An Iorram Dharaich'.
[88] Thomas Sinton 1906, p. 91, by Margaret Cameron for Alasdair MacDonald.
[89] *PTWH* vol 2, p. 115, 'Mac Iain Dìreach'.
[90] *NGP*, p. 197.
[91] *ibid*, p. 308.
[92] M. MacLeod Banks 1939, p. 55. There is a commentary in this source provided by Neil A. R. MacKay, M.A. of Lewis : 'The "*maide cam*" is the bent bough which suddenly strikes the passer by who does not notice it — the meaning here is literal, but in the next two lines... the words are used figuratively, "*cam*" being used to indicate a cunning, deceiving disposition...'.

Many of the metaphors in proverbs relate to the moulding of the characters of children in their youth just as trees are coppiced and saplings are curved and fashioned to meet a future purpose. *'Is duilich camadh thoirt a daraig a dh'fhàs anns an fhaillean* [It is difficult to take the twist out of the oak that grew in the sapling]'[93] or, more in proactive terms, *'Lùb am faillean is chan fhairtlich a' chraobh ort* [Bend the sapling and the tree won't defy you].'[94] These sorts of metaphors appear in Gaelic poetry as well, especially religious didactic verse:

Ma bhios d' òige gun riaghladh
'S d' ana-mianna gun taod riutha
Gum fàs iad cho fiadhaich
'S nach srian thu ri d' aois iad;
Am meangan nach snìomh thu
Cha spìon thu 'na chraoibh e
Mar shìneas e 'gheugan
Bidh a fhreumhan a' sgaoileadh...[95]

If your youth is without regulation
And your lusts are without restraint
They will grow so wild
That you will not control them in adulthood;
The sapling that you do not wrench
You will not extract as a tree
As it stretches its branches
Its roots will be spreading...

It is very common for Gaelic love songs to speak about the ability or inability of the wooer to bend the will of his sweetheart, just as he would attempt to flex a tree or branch:

Geug fo bhlàth o barr gu talamh
A lùb mi farasta nuas...[96]

A branch in bloom from top to ground
That I gently plied downwards...

Cha bhi mi 'strì ris a' chraoibh nach lùb leam
Ged chinneadh ùbhlan air bharr gach gèig...[97]

I won't struggle against the tree that I can't bend

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[93] *NGP*, p. 255.
[94] *ibid*, p. 336.
[95] Dughall Bochanan 1946, p. 54, 'An Geamhradh'.
[96] *ODB*, l. 1672-3, 'Òran d' a chéile nuadh-phòsda'.
[97] 'Mo Rùn Geal Dìleas', traditional.

Even if apples grew on the tips of every branch...

A chaoidh na cur dùil
Anns a' chraoibh nach lùb leat.[98]

Never put (your) hopes
In the tree that you cannot bend.

The characteristics of trees are sometimes compared with the dispositions or emotional states of people. It is not flattering of someone's character to say that he is *'Cho crosda ris an dris* [As cross (or perverse) as the bramble]'.[99] Similarly, *'Am fear a bhios fearg air a ghnàth 's coltach a ghnè ris an dris* [The man who is always angry, his nature is that of the bramble]'.[100] The fact that the bramble is full of thorns and the person who makes contact with it will suffer brings forth the idea that it is cross and angry.

Even more interesting is the territorial and aggressive nature attributed to the ash: *'Thachair ludh uinnsinn fhiadhaich dha; cinnidh e gu math, ach millidh e a' chraobh a bhios an taice ris* [The way of the wild ash befell him; it grows well but it destroys the tree that is next to it].'[101] This may be a reference to the quickly growing and deeply penetrating root system of the ash, which was believed to be a mirror image of the tree above ground.[102]

It is not uncommon to compare the restless leaves moving on the tree branch to the restless mind or trembling heart of the poet:

'S ann tha m' inntinn cho luaineach
Ris na duilleagan uain' air a' chrann...[103]

Surely my mind is as unsettled
As the green leaves on the branch...

Tha mo chridhe cho luaineach
Ri duilleach na craoibh...[104]

My heart as is bustling
As the foliage of the tree...

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98 *E*, p. 48, 'Òran a rinneadh Jain Beaton fear Dhuin an Eirthirich, do nighean Thearlaich oig Scalpa 'n trath'; see also *MD*, l. 221-4.
99 *NGP*, p. 151.
100 *ibid*, p. 13.
101 *Dw*, '*ludh*'. Also in *NGP*, p. 405.
102 Hugh Fife 1994, p. 164.
103 *NBT*, p. 82, 'Marbhrann do Mrs. Noble', Bàrd Thighearna Chola.
104 George Henderson 1898, p. 49, Bàrd Phabaidh.

More complex or abstract analogies are also expressed, drawing upon parallels between the world of humans and the world of trees, and trying to infer a conclusion in one world based on the logic of the other. An international proverb, a variant of which appears in the Bible, is: *'Aithnichear craobh nas fhearr air a toradh na air a duilleach* [A tree can be identified better according to its fruit than according to its foliage].'[105] The English adages 'Like father, like son' and 'a chip off the old block' can be paralleled by the Gaelic tree analogy *'Is dual do'n fhaillean bhith mar a bhios an stoc* [The nature of the sapling is inherited from the trunk/stock]'.[106] We are again reminded that wood is best moulded when it is young and pliable, and the significance of this for humans is merely implied: *'Lùb am faillean 'nuair a tha e maoth* [Bend the sapling when it is tender].'[107]

The unidentified authoress of a waulking song expresses her grief by comparing her state to that of the tree:

Chan eil falt orm air fuireach
Nach do shearg mar an duilleach
Mar challtainn 's mar chuileann...[108]

No hair remains on me
That hasn't shrivelled like the foliage
Like hazel and like holly...

Maighstir Seathain wrote a romantic love song to a young woman, claiming that as surely as the features of trees reveal their nature, so must her outer beauty be testimony to her inner beauty:

Chan fhàs ùbhlan air an dris
Na deagh mhios air coille chrìn
'S ni'n creidinn gur cridhe cruaidh
Tha fo'n dà ghruaidh as maisich sgèimh...[109]

Apples don't grow on the bramble
Or fine fruit in withered woods
And I could not believe that it is a hard heart
That is under those two most gorgeous cheeks...

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105 *RC*, vol II (Dr. Cameron's Proverbs), p. 476.
106 *ibid*, p. 495.
107 *ibid*, p. 501.
108 *OLMNA*, p. 26.
109 *EB*, lines 1298-1301, 'Òran d'a Leannan'.

Another proverb, *'Geinn dheth fhèin a sgoilteas an darach* [A wedge of itself splits the oak]'[110] refers to the ancient practice of hammering oak wedges into an oak tree in order to break off planks of wood. This is elaborated as a metaphor in the love song by Donnchadh Bàn:

Is chuala mi mar sheanfhacal
Mu'n darach gur fiodh corr e
'S gur geinn dheth fhèin 'ga theannachadh
A spealtadh e 'na òirdnibh;
'S mi 'n dùil a rèir na h-ealaidh sin
Gur math leat mi bhith 'd sheòrsa...[111]

I've heard it said as a proverb
About the oak, that it is a singular wood,
And that it would take a wedge of it being driven
To cleave it into splinters;
And I imagine it is according to that craft
That you would like me to be of your kind...

However, the most common analogy in Gaelic tradition is *'Cha robh coille riamh gun chrìonaich* [There was never a forest without a withered tree]', similar to 'There's a rotten one in every bunch' in English[112] and this shows up, particularly in poetry of dispraise, in the verse of *An Clàrsair Dall*, Iain Lom, and many others.[113]

Sometimes, rather than expressing similarity, tension or tragedy can be emphasised by contrasting the human world with the natural world:

Thig blàth air a' ghiuthas
Agus ùbhlan air gèig
Cinnidh gucag air luachair
'S cha ghluais mo bhean fhèin...[114]

The blossom will come to the pine
And apples on a branch
The flower will grow on the rush
And my own wife will not stir...

Finally, traditional Gaelic poetry often draws upon tree imagery and symbolism used as simile:

'S mi mar chraoibh air a snaidheadh
'S i air lùbadh 's air laidhe a bhàn...[115]

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[110] *NGP*, p. 225. See also *RC* II, p. 486.
[111] *ODB*, l. 1564-9, 'Òran Gaoil'.
[112] *NGP*, p. 136.
[113] See for example *BG*, l. 858; *OIL*, l. 781.
[114] *D*, p. 34, 'Cha dig Mór...'.

I am like a tree whittled away
Bent over and lying downwards...

Bha 'n deichnear sin cho pòiste riut
'S tha 'n ùir ri freumh nan crann...[116]

Those ten men were as wedded to you
As the soil is to the roots of trees...

'S tric le mogul nan cnò caola
Seasamh fad ri gaoith air chrann
'S ionnan sin 's mar dh'èirich dhut-sa...[117]

Frequently does the cluster of lesser nuts
Withstand the wind on the branch for a long time
That is similar to your case...

...or as metaphor: *'Trì nithean brèagha: long fo sheòl, craobh fo bhlàth, is duine naomh air leabaidh bàis* [Three beautiful things: a ship under sail, a tree in bloom, and a holy man on his death bed]'.[118] Oisin is credited with a poem lamenting his lonely condition by employing tree images:

'S mi 'n aon chrann 's a' chnoc
'S mi 'n stoc ri 'm buailtear tonn...
'S mi 'n aon chnò 'sa' mhogul
'S gun chnothan eile 'nam fhaicsinn
Is beag am bogadh le' n tuiteam
'S gaoth dol fodham gu farsaing...[119]

I am the only tree on the hill
I am the trunk against which the wave strikes...
I am the only nut in the cluster
Unable to see any other nuts
Their falling caused little disturbance
With the wind going all around under me...

Màiri Mhòr nan Òran was one of the more innovative nineteenth century poets drawing upon tree metaphors and similes. Couched in poetic phrases that seem far older than the end of the nineteenth century, she says that Charles Fraser-Mackintosh was no barren tree, for others will draw further sustenance from his works:

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115 Thomas Sinton 1906, p. 288.
116 *OID,* l. 163-4, 'Òran do dh'Aonghus Bhail' Fhionnlaigh'.
117 Angus Matheson 1951, p. 371, Dòmhnall Gorm Sléiteach 's Am Fear Carrach.
118 Rev. Duncan Campbell 1978, no. 897.
119 *DL,* p. 169, 'Roinn do Rinneadh le Oisean MacFinn'; see also *An Gàidheal* Sept. 1872, p. 190; *RC* II, p. 334.

'S nuair chrìochnaicheadh a chùrsa leis
Cha b'ann mar chraoibh gun ùbhlan e
Oir dh'fhàgadh measan cùbhraidh leis
Bheir ùrachadh 's a' ghleann duinn...[120]

And when he finished his course
He was not like the tree without apples
For he has left fragrant fruits
Which will give us renewal in the glen...

Drawing upon this same set of images, she says of another person:

Mar dh'aithn'chear a' chraobh air a blàth
'S a' mhèinn a tha fàs fo freumh
Bha do chreideamh le d' oibribh làn bàigh;
'S do dhuilleach gu bràth cha chrìon...[121]

Just as the tree is recognised by its fruits
While its qualities grow under its roots
Your beliefs, and your works, were full of warmth
And your foliage will never wither...

Tree-praise fit for the King

Some of the human-tree symbolism is most appropriate in reference to the highest members of the social order, that is, the *rì* of early Gaeldom, or the *ceann-cinnidh* of later Scottish Gaeldom. The tree term that is usually reserved for the top of the human social order is *bile*, an 'ancient and venerated tree'.

Several early Irish texts[122] of a cosmological nature give accounts of five aboriginal sacred trees in Ireland: *Eó Mugna* (an oak), *Eó Rossa* (a yew), *Bile Tortan* (an ash), *Bile Dathi* (an ash) and *Craeb Uisnig* (an ash). The most important qualifications for a *bile* are age and veneration,[123] though size is undoubtedly a factor. These texts describe the ancient sacred trees as being

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[120] Màiri Nic-a-Phearsoin 1891, pp. 142-3, 'Soraidh Slàn, A Thearlaich, Leat'.

[121] Màiri Nic-a-Phearsoin 1891, p. 67, 'Marbhrann'. I have changed *fo fhreumh* given in the original text to *fo freumh*, in keeping with the feminine gender of *craobh*. As Professor William Gillies has pointed out to me, this seems to be a mixed metaphor based on the distinction between faith and works.

[122] References to the trees are summarised in A. T. Lucas 1963, pp. 17-20. The main sources are the *Prose Dinnshenchas* (ed. Whitley Stokes in *Revue Celtique* 15-16 1894-5), the *Metrical Dinnshenchas* (Gwynn 1924) and 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara' (ed. R. I. Best, *Ériu* 4, 1910). The *Eó Mugna* is also mentioned in *Félire Óengusso Céli Dé* and *Eó Rossa* in the life of St. Laserian.

[123] Alden Watson 1981, p. 165.

supernaturally enormous, covering a huge area and providing shelter for the entire tribe.[124]

Alden Watson gives several reasons for the correspondence between the *bile* and the *rìgh*: 'a sacred tree was a usual feature of the Irish inauguration site';[125] the genealogical metaphor (king as 'trunk' of spreading dynasty);[126] many of the characteristics describing the *Eó Rossa* in the *Prose Dinnshenchas* relate to kingship;[127] the *bile* was the 'divine *axis mundi* which connected the tribe with heaven and made the hierophany of sovereignty possible'.[128] Furthermore, all four of the trees appeared at the birth of Conn, the legendary ancestor of the kings of Ireland, whose birth also ordered the landscape of Ireland.[129]

In like fashion, the *ceann-cinnidh* [chieftain] of late Scottish Gaeldom is often described as the over-arching tree providing shelter and protection for his entire tribe. John MacInnes[130] seems to have been the first to point to the lore surrounding those ancient sacred trees of Ireland, and their role as *axis mundi*, as a source for the tree symbolism of the social leader in the Gaelic Panegyric Code. His role as protector can be as brief as an allusion to the tree of shelter:

> *Thuit craobh chosgarra ar dìdein*
> *Bha 'gar dìon o gach anshocair...*[131]
>
> The triumphant tree of our shelter has fallen
> Who protected us from every distress...

The lament for the laird of Applecross elaborates the theme, portraying the laird as the tallest tree of the grove who was so large that all of the Gaels could sit around it and find shelter:

> *A' chraobh thu b' àirde anns a' choille*
> *Thar gach preas bha thu soilleir*
> *A' cumail dìon air an doire*
> *Le d' sgèimh ghuirm fo bhlàth dhuilleag;*
> *Cha b'e 'mhàin Clanna Choinnich*

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[124] *ibid*, p. 176.
[125] *ibid*, p. 170.
[126] *ibid*, p. 170.
[127] *ibid*, p. 170-2.
[128] *ibid*, p. 175. See also Séamas Ó Catháin 1995, p. 16.
[129] *ibid*, p. 172.
[130] John MacInnes 1978, p. 458.
[131] *ID*, l. 688-9, 'Cumha Chlann Dòmhnuill'.

Bhiodh mun cuairt dhuit mu Challainn
Bhiodh gach fine agus sloinneadh
A' teachd le càirdeas 'ad choinneamh:
Bhiodh fir Èireann 's nan eilean mu d' bhòrd...[132]

You were the highest tree in the forest
You were visible above every bush
Protecting the grove
With your verdant beauty of blooming foliage;
It was not only the Mackenzies
Who would gather around you on Hogmanay
Every people and lineage
Would come to meet you in friendship
The men of Ireland and the islands would be about your table...

Imagery even more symbolic and archaistic is employed in this verse:

Chunnaic mise as mo chadal
A' chraobh ùrail bu taitneach
'S a duilleach cur fasgadh air ceudan;
Is na freumhaichean sùghmhor
A ghineadh o thùs i
Gur brìghmhor an ùir ás na dh'èirich.
'S truagh nan tuiteadh a' chraobh seo...[133]

I saw in my sleep
The flourishing tree, which was most pleasing,
And its foliage giving shelter to hundreds;
From moisture-laden roots
Was it begotten at first
Verile is the soil from which they rose.
Pity if this tree were to fall...

In parallel with the *bile*, the king was the human equivalent of the *axis mundi*, connecting heaven and earth.[134] In this regard it is interesting to note the Old Irish *Audacht Morainn*'s exhortation: 'Tell him, it is through the justice of the ruler that plagues [and] great lightnings are kept from the people.'[135] There was a strong correlation in Indo-European tradition, attested to in folklore and etymology, between trees and lightning.[136] The 'noble,

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[132] *GC*, p. 176, 'Marbhrann Thighearna na Comraich' circa 1684.

[133] Domhnull MacLeòid 1811, pp. 104-5, by Mrs. Major Alasdair MacLeod to Sir John MacPherson circa 1770. The final line is given in the source as *'S truagh ma'n tuiteadh...* which could be a typographical error, or, if corrected as *mu'n tuiteadh* could be 'about whom would fall...'. It has also been pointed out to me by Dr. Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh, however, that Dr. Seosamh Watson has drawn attention to the existence of *man* as a dialectical varient for *nan* in some areas of Nova Scotia.

[134] Tom Sjöblom 1994, pp. 160, 161-2, 164.

[135] Fergus Kelly 1976a, §12.

[136] Séamas Ó Catháin 1995, pp. 74-5; Jaan Puhvel 1987, pp. 226-7.

sheltering tree in the forest' (i.e., the chieftain) is all the more vulnerable for its great height. These associations may contribute to such symbolism as:

Ach thilg dubh dhoireann a' gheamhraidh
A' bheithir theinntidh le strann as an speur
Thuit an gallan ùr rìomhach...[137]

But the dark storm of the winter cast
The fire-bolt with thunder from the skye
The young comely sapling fell...

Is mi 'n t-aon chrann anns a' chnoc
Air mo ghoin le Rìgh nan Neul...[138]

I am the only tree on the hill
Wounded by the King of the Firmament...

As the chieftain was symbolically wedded to the tribal territory, the quality of his rule was made manifest in nature itself. This is often expressed in terms of the produce and state of the trees; as *Audacht Morainn* expresses it, 'It is through the justice of the ruler that abundances of great tree-fruit of the great wood are tasted'.[139] The *Eó Mugna* was said to produce acorns, nuts and apples thrice a year under the king's decree.[140]

The trees made obeisance to the chieftain just as though they were his subjects. Donnchadh Dubh Campbell was *'aon dár umhlaidh fiodh is fonn* [one to whom wood and soil made obeisance]'.[141] In vegetal imagery drawing upon human-tree parallelism, but asserting human superiority, the Islesmen are *'gasruigh fhial fá bhfiar feghach* [generous saplings about which foliage bends]'.[142] In magical imagery reminiscent of Hollywood, the branches moved before Raghnall King of Man: *'gluaisid gaeth dot chinn craebha* [The wind moves branches before you]'.[143] The poet Artúr Dall uses the same imagery in his praise to MacSuibhne:

Léigid géaga a nglúine fútha
feartha fáilte rér bhfhlaith ceóil...[144]

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137 *BG*, l. 630-1.
138 *RC* II (Turner MS), p. 334, 'Cumha nam Brathair'.
139 Fergus Kelly 1976a, §17.
140 Alden Watson 1981, p. 173, from *Prose Dindsenchas* §34 and §160.
141 William J. Watson 1917, quatrain 3.
142 Ronald Black 1973, rann 18.
143 Brian Ó Cuiv 1955, quatrain 33.
144 Donald Meek 1997, §20.

Branches fall down on their knees
They are obliged to give welcome to our melodious prince...

The just and rightful rule of the Scottish Gaelic chieftain was made manifest in the fertility of the land and the bounty of the trees:[145]

Ré linn leómhuin Locha Fíne
fiodhbhuidh lúbtha ó chnuas na ccrann...[146]

During the time of the lion of Loch Fyne
Woods were bent from the fruit of branches...

Cuiridh coille trom-bhlàth os ar cionn...[147]
The forest will put out a heavy-blossom above us...

Lìon barrach air a' chrann
Air chùmhnant thu thigh'n fallain
Gu Tùr Garranach nan gleann...[148]

Foliage filled the tree
On the condition that you come safely
To Glengarry Tower...

In the above imagery, the good king secures a good natural environment. In the inverse imagery, the so-called pathetic fallacy, trees are said to wither or lose their fruit and fertility at the death of the king:

Mar choll gun chnuasach gun mheas
Tha d' fhonn sgìreachd as d' eugmhais...[149]

Like a hazel without produce or fruit
Is the land of your territory in your absence...

Chaidh toradh na coille air chall
A cnuasachd, a blàth 's a meas...[150]

The produce of the forest has been lost
Its produce, its blossom and its fruit...

A further important term in tree kennings or epithets of the *rìgh* or chieftain is *sìthe*, sometimes appearing with *craobh* or *crann*, as in these examples:

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145 See *CGP*, pp. 19-20; John MacInnes 1978, p. 458.
146 *CGP*, p. 29. From NLS Adv. Lib. MS. LII., 3a and 29a.
147 *HSFF*, p. 6, line 42, 'Òran air bhreith Phrionnsa Tearlach', Iain Mac Lachlainn.
148 *MC*, p. 93, 'Òran do dh'Alasdair Ruadh Ghlinne Garadh'.
149 *BG*, l. 5924-5, 'Marbhrann Dhòmhnaill Ghuirm Òig', 1643, Murchadh MacCoinnich.
150 *E*, p. 26, 'Marbhrann do Mhac-Dhùghail Dhunolladh, Jain Ciar, le Dònull Mac an t-Saoir'.

Rìoghchrann-sìthe nan Eilean...[151]
Kingly-staff of peace of the Islands...

Craobh-shìothchainte dhuinn air fad thu...[152]
You are the branch of peace for us all...

Is ceann na sìth anns gach càs thu...[153]
You are the leader of peace in every distress...

Ce'n crann le'm bu mhaiseach sìth...[154]
Who is the branch who cherishes peace...

In the early Irish tale *Immram Brain* [Voyage of Bran], Bran has an encounter with an Otherworld woman bearing a silver-branch from the apple-tree of Emain. In later texts of the eleventh and twelfth-centuries, Sencha, counselor to the Ulster king, appears with a *cráeb-shíde* [peace-branch]. In the *Immacallam in dà Thuarad* [Colloquy of the Two Sages] it is stated that poets had silvered, golden or brass branches, according to their rank.[155] Kaarina Hollo has traced the development of this literary motif in early Irish tales and suggests that it 'sprang from a combination of the topos of Conchobar's royal sceptre with that of the musical branch from the Otherworld tree.'[156] Two different traditions of branches, that of the kingly figure and one with musical, poetic, Otherworldly associations, become fused through the unifying concept of *sìdhe*.[157]

The element *sìdhe* refers not only to peace, such as that found in the Otherworld, but to the supernatural authority, *sìdhe*, upon which the king is dependent in order to rule. The cosmological nexus of these two homonyms in relation to kingship is explained by Ó Cathasaigh:

> ...first, that legitimate kingship has its source in the Otherworld, and, secondly, that the reign of the righteous king is marked by peace (as well as plenty) in the land. That is as much as to say that 1 *síd* denotes the source of *fír flathemon*, and 2 *síd* is its symptom.[158]

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151 *BG*, l. 5897, 'Marbhrann Dhòmhnuill Ghuirm Òig'.
152 *BG*, l. 3175, 'Laoidh an Tàilleir'.
153 Duncan Campbell 1888, p. 231, 'Òran do Raibeart Stewart, Tighearna Ghart'.
154 *DL*, p. 153, 'Marbhrann do rinneadh le Eòin Mac Coinnich air bhàs Choinnich'.
155 Whitley Stokes 1905, §6.
156 Kaarina Hollo 1995, p. 23.
157 *ibid*, p. 18.
158 Tomás Ó Cathasaigh 1977-9, p. 140. See also Norman Aitchison 1994, pp. 67-70.

It is in the light of this branch with Otherworld associations and the symbolism of the chieftain as *bile* that we can interpret Iain Lom's anxious warning to the MacDonalds of Keppoch about the social crisis which erupted either as the reason for, or in the aftermath of, the Keppoch Murder:

Chuir sinn romhainn ***craobh shìthe***
Chumadh dìon oirnne gu leòr
Cha bu chòir dhuinn bhith strìth rith'
Am fad cian bhiomaid beò
Mas sinn fèin a chur sìos i
B'olc a shìothlaidh sud oirnn
Tuitidh tuagh oirnn a Flaitheas
Leis an sgathar na meòir...[159]

We put a tree of peace before us
Which would protect us well
We should not be contending with it
For as long as we live
If it is we ourselves who have brought it down
Poorly for us has it turned out
An axe will fall on us from Heaven
By which limbs will be severed...

Iain Lom is lamenting not only the deaths of the persons involved, but the disruption of the mores of the social system itself, invoking its sacred origin and function and warning of the divine retribution they were liable to pay for its violation. In doing so, he maintains the powerfully concrete, macabre and ambiguous tree imagery, in which the *meòir* to be lopped off could be interpreted as human limbs, offices of the chieftancy or branches of the clan.

The imagery of the *axis mundi* also seems to appear in a poem exhorting Perthshire Gaels to join the militia to fight in the American colony and safeguard royal authority. After threats to British rule are thwarted, peace and plenty will be re-established with the reconnection of the *craobh-sìthe*:

'N sin gabhaidh ***craobh na sìth*** *le freumh*
Teann ghreim do'n doimhne thalmhainn
Is sìnidh 'geuga gu ruig nèamh
Gach àird le sèamh-mheas 's geal-bhlàth.
Bidh ceilear èibhinn eun nam meaghlan
'S daoine le'n clainn a' sealbhachadh
Toradh is saoth'r an làmh gun mhaoim
Fo dhubhar caomh a sgàil 's i sgaoilsinn.
Gach gleann nì èibhneas 's maoth-bhlàth èirigh

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[159] *OIL*, l. 1070-7.

Air gach beinn bha fàsail...
Thig pailteas, saorsa, gràdh is aoidheachd
A measg dhaoine, dh'àitich...[160]

Then the tree of peace and its roots will
Take a tight grip on the base of the earth
And its branches will stretch toward heaven
Gentle fruit and white-blossom in every airt.
There will be the merry melody of the birds of the branches
And people with their children living there
Bounty and work of their hands unfailing
Under the gentle shadow of (the tree's) shade as it expands.
Every glen will rejoice with tender blossoms rising
On every hill that was deserted...
There will be freedom, love, generosity
Among the people who settled...

It is quite significant that these two invocations of the *craobh-sìthe* occur in the context of social and political crisis. John MacInnes emphasises the stabilising role of traditional values invoked in the panegyric code:

> Its diction is codified in sets of conventional images most densely concentrated in the heroic elegy composed at the point of crisis brought about by the death of a leader — precisely when it was most necessary to reaffirm the traditional values of society.[161]

These same principles emerge from the two above examples: the implicit cosmology that underlies the political foundation of society are explicitly stated when they are perceived to be under threat.

The king had a sacred nature in ancient Gaelic society, and it is no surprise that many archaic, or at least archiastic, traditions lingered in respect to the requirements and functions of kingship.[162] Some of these traditions and images are rooted in his role as the *axis mundi* for his people: 'The king is the centre of the cosmos'.[163]

It may also be significant that one of the meanings for *ceann-sìthe* given by Dwelly is 'penis', for this parallels the Nordic *zoa* term for the world tree.[164]

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160 *G*, pp. 115-6, 'Òran a rinneadh d' an chath-bhuidhinn Rioghail Ghaoidheallach nuair bha iad dol d' America san Bhliadhna 1756'. While no author is given in *G*, other sources identify the author of this as the Reverend James MacLagan.

161 John MacInnes 1981, pp. 157-8.

162 An up-to-date discusssion may be found in Norman Aitchison 1994, pp. 59-63.

163 Tomás Ó Cathasaigh 1977-9, p. 140.

164 Séamas Ó Catháin 1995, p. 130 (note 72), p. 142.

The *Lia Fáil* of ancient Tara was also considered an *axis mundi* and had phallic connotations.[165]

It may be useful for us to compare these motifs with those which appear all over the world regarding those holy men, the shamans:

> ...the specifically shamanic techniques and ideologies — for example, ascending to Heaven by means of a tree or "magic flight" — are documented all over the world... Equally widespread are the beliefs concerning an *axis mundi* at the center of the universe,...[166]

The autobiography of a Avam-Samoyed shaman contains scenes describing his shamanic initiation in which are variations of these themes:

> ...after many adventures, was carried to an island, in the middle of which stood a young birch tree which reached up to Heaven. It was the Tree of the Lord of the Earth, and the Lord gave him a branch of it to make himself a drum...[167]

It may be in the context of such 'primal' universal belief systems that we can best understand such rituals as the bestowing of the white wand of sovereignty upon the newly inaugurated king as he is united with the sovereignty-land goddess and becomes the *bile* of his people.

Human Social Ranking and the Forest Taxonomies

Humankind from the earliest times has perceived order in the natural world and was apt to classify nature according to anthropocentric values. On the other hand, there was also a tendency to justify the human order by referring to what was perceived to be the 'natural order' as demonstrated in nature. Aristotle, for example, 'popularized the notion that animals differed in character, some being noble and others mean,'[168] and such perceptions continue to inform popular imagination (such as in the adage 'busy as a bee' or 'lazy as a dog') and even political ideology (such as in the notion of social Darwinism). Even the distinction between 'plants' and 'weeds' rests upon some culturally-specific agenda.[169]

> The work of many anthropologists suggests that it is an enduring tendency of human thought to project upon the natural world (and particularly the animal kingdom) categories and values derived from human society and then to serve

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165 Alwyn and Brinley Rees 1961, p. 146.
166 Mircea Eliade 1958, p. 100.
167 *ibid*, p. 90.
168 Keith Thomas 1983, p. 58.
169 *ibid*, p. 270.

> them back as a critique or reinforcement of the human order, justifying some particular social or political arrangement on the grounds that it is somehow more 'natural' than any alternative.[170]

The Gaelic poetic order demonstrates, from the earliest records, a strong predilection for taxonomies and schemata. Although these may have been theoretical prescriptions for the ordering of society more than realistic descriptions of how society was actually able to function, they still distinctly convey the impression that the early Gaelic 'social engineers' had a particular model in mind, inherited or invented, for the ordering of society.

> Early Irish society is hierarchical and inegalitarian. These characteristics are reflected clearly in the laws... Distinctions of rank figure prominently in practically all Irish law-texts...[171]

The poets were much given to creating schemata applied to the natural world which echoed, and perhaps to some extent were seen to justify, the human social order: animals, birds, plants, food and other categories were frequently divided into noble and non-noble classes according to their inherent characteristics and their uses and associations in society.[172] Once this was done, representatives from each class could be employed in order to praise or dispraise.[173]

Trees were among those categories schematised, and we have testimony in the Gaelic record no later than the 7th century for this classification.[174] One of the Old Irish legal tracts which explicitly deals with trees[175] is *Bretha Comaithcheas*, dating from about the 8th century, which contains a four-fold classification of seven trees each: *airig fedo* [nobles of the wood] — *daur, coll, cuilenn, ibar, uinnius, ochtach, aball* [oak, hazel, holly, yew, ash, pine and apple], *aithig fedo* [commoners of the wood] — *fern, sail, scé, cáerthann, beithe, lem, idath* [alder, willow, hawthorn, rowan, birch, elm and wild cherry], *fodla fedo* [lower divisions of the wood] — *draigen, trom, féorus, findcholl, caithne, crithach, crann fir* [blackthorn, elder, spindle-tree, whitebeam, strawberry tree, aspen and juniper] and *losa fedo* [bushes of the

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170 *ibid*, p. 61.
171 Fergus Kelly 1988, pp. 7-8.
172 *CGP*, pp. 18-9. John MacInnes 1978, p. 454.
173 *ibid*, p. 460.
174 D. A. Binchy 1971, p. 152.
175 Edited in Fergus Kelly 1976b. See Liam Breatnach 1996, p. 36, for the most recent discussion of trees in the law tracts of the *Senchas Már*.

wood] — *raith, rait, aitean, dris, fróech, gilcach, spín* [bracken, bog-myrtle, gorse, bramble, heather and wild rose].[176]

'The division of the most important trees into seven noble and seven non-noble varieties is imitated from the laws relating to the status of persons...'.[177] These 28 trees do not, of course, cover all possible trees and shrubs, and the biological taxonomy as reflected in the Gaelic language demonstrates an understanding different to the modern Latin-based scientific scheme:

> The compiler of the tree list obviously had a good knowledge of trees... He generally does not distinguish between different species of the same genus... However, sometimes two species of a single genus are sufficiently unlike to be treated separately...[178]

The inclusion in one group or another was based largely on 'economic importance' — while the size of the tree was a prime contributor, the utility of its wood and fruits was also critical.[179]

Although Brythonic society is based on similar hierarchical principles and several different kinds of tree lists exist in literature and law, we have no evidence of trees being placed in any taxonomy of this manner in Brythonic society.[180]

The next major discussion of this tree classification scheme occurs in the Gaelic scholastic tract *Auraicept na n-Éces*. In a section ostensibly discussing the *ogham* alphabet, the four classes (with their original names as given above) and the seven trees in each class are listed. Only a few of the names have changed between these two records: noble tree *ochtach* becomes *gius* [pine], commoner tree *idath* is replaced by *crithach* [aspen] (promoted from previously being in the lower division), lower division *crithach* and *caithne* [strawberry tree] are replaced by *fedlend* [test-tree ?] and *fidhat* [bird-cherry].

We have no further explicit evidence for tree classification schemes until the thematically-organised dictionaries of the 18th century. One such that appears with tree categories is the dictionary by Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, whose poetry confirms that he was familiar with at least some

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176 See discussion in Fergus Kelly 1976b for original Old Gaelic names and problems with identification.
177 *ibid*, p. 107.
178 *ibid*, pp. 107-8.
179 *ibid*, p. 108.
180 Marged Haycock 1990, p. 302 (note 38). This weakens, though it does not discount, the possibility of this being a common Celtic social feature.

exemplars of the traditional Gaelic tree classes. The categories which he gives are: *Do Thaobh Luidhain & Blathain* [Physical Herbs and Flowers] (§ XLI), *Do Thaobh Preashairnaich no Raschrann* [Shrubs] (§ XLIII), *Do Thaobh Chrannabhmeasa* [Of Fruit-Trees] (§ XLIV) and *Do Thaobh Chrann neamhthorrthannach* [Of Barren Trees] (§ XLV). These categories are based on a modern European utilitarian perspective of plants — what fruits they produced and how they might be exploited. There is no reflection in this schema of the old Gaelic order.[181]

We should now examine how consistent the evidence in Scottish Gaelic poetry is with the old traditional taxonomy.[182]

The most common tree named in eulogy is *abhall* [the apple tree], one of the seven chieftain trees. The apple tree and its fruit often appear in Gaelic poetry, a reflection of its Otherworld connotations (discussed further in Chapter Three) and its corresponding high status in the original tree taxonomy. It has a long history of use as a metaphor:

a chráobh abhla Tholcha Té...[183]
O branch of the apple tree of Tulach Té...

Bu tu an t-ubhal thar meas àrd chraoibh...[184]
You were the apple above the fruit of a tall tree ...

Gur e abhall an lios seo / Tha mise ag iargain...[185]
It is the apple-tree of this orchard / That I am lamenting...

The polar opposition between *saor* [noble] and *daor* [ignoble] is almost invariably expressed by invoking yew and alder (respectively), such as this comparison of two Irish chiefs by a poet thought to be from Gigha:

Ní cionta ré chéile a gcur
slat fhearna agus slat iubhair;
slacán don fhiodh fhearna fhiar
agus m' fhiodh feardha fírfhial...[186]

No crime it is to put them side by side
A rod of alder and a rod of yew

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181 He writes in the book's dedication: 'I have followed the Method of the most approved Vocabularies, and rang'd the Words in a natural Order, have added many words...'. See Francis Thompson 1993, p. 53, for some information about the origins of Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's dictionary.

182 Some of the following has been examined in Raghnall MacilleDhuibh 1996a.

183 *IBP*, p. 165, §29, 'Address to Séumas Mac Aonghuis', late 16th C.?

184 *GSMM*, l. 555, 'Cròna an Taibh'.

185 *GSMM*, l. 613-4, 'Cumha do Mhac Leòid'.

186 *BA*, lines 465-8, by Giolla Críost Brúilingeach before 1458.

A cudgel of crooked alder wood
And my manly right generous timber...

Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair makes a satirical pun, contrasting the 'yew' embedded in the territorial style of Colin Campbell with his 'ignoble' nature:

Ge toil leam Cailean Ghlinn Iubhair
b'fhearr leam gum b'iubhar 's nach b'fhearna...

Although I like Colin of Yew-Glen
I wish he were a yew and not an alder...

There is a very old Gaelic proverb, '*(Is odhar gach sean,) is geal gach nodha, gu ruige snodhach an fhearna* [(Every old thing is dun), every new thing is shiny white, even the sap of the alder]', implying that even the ignoble alder, when newly stripped, is white, and thus appealing, for a short while.[187] Iain mac Ailein mhic Iain draws upon this proverb, implying that the new King William, while his newly established reign might be appealing to some, is ignoble in character:

...dearmad dìreach thighinn nan inntinn
O'n do chinn iad deònach
M'an rìgh dùthcha fèin a dhiùchar
Airson dìuc na Fòlaint :
Ach facal soitheamh thuirt neach roimhe
Gum bi gach nodha ro gheal.[188]

(it was) plain ignorance coming into their
heads, since they became party to the
banishing of their own country's king
In favour of the Duke of Holland;
But someone once said this gentle saying:
Everything new is very white.

Other than the apple tree, the yew is the archetypal tree of praise...

Slat de'n iubhar uasal
a bhuaineadh a taigh Chaladair...[189]

A rod of the noble yew
That was reaped from the house of Cawdor...

Tha 'n t-slat-s' a' tigh'nn 'na m chuimhn'
De 'n iubhar àluinn ghaganach

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187 *NGP*, p. 315; *GC*, p. 233 (note 4g-h).
188 *GC*, p. 186, 'Coille Cragaidh'.
189 *T*, p. 251, by James Shaw, the Lochnell Poet, describing Campbell of Airds.

De 'n aiteam sin, Sìol Chuinn;...[190]

That rod is coming into my mind
Of that beautiful clustered yew
Of that people, the descendants of Conn...

'S tu 'n t-iubhar uasal acfhuinneach...[191]
You are the noble expert yew...

...Nach ann de'n chrìonaich a dh'fhàs e
Slat de'n iubhar as àille...[192]

That is was not of the withered branch that he
grew (but) a rod of the most beautiful yew...

...although holly is also commonly used for praise:

Cha chraobh mhosgain, no 'chrìonaich a th'ann
Ach an cuileann 's gach àm a bhios gorm...[193]

He is no rotten tree or withered branch
But the holly, which is always green...

Bu shamhladh craobh de'n chuileann dhuit
Nach b' urrainn càch a shnìomh
'S a' phàirc bu ghallan mullaich thu
Measg bhun de choille chrìon...[194]

You were the likeness of the holly tree
That no one else could twist
You were the topmost sapling in the field
Among the stumps in a withered forest...

'S i 'chraobh chuilinn chruaidh chòmhnaird...[195]
She is the rugged, even holly tree...

Craobh de'n chuileann nach crìonadh...[196]
A tree of holly that would not wither...

Slat de'n chuileann 'bha ciatach...[197]
A rod of holly that was elegant...

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190 *MC*, p. 94, 'Òran do dh'Alasdair Ruadh Ghlinnegharadh'.
191 *OIL*, p. 384, 'Òran Molaidh do Thighearnadh Shriuthan Ceann-feana Chlann Donachaidh'.
192 *NBT*, p. 18, by Archibald MacLean to Gilleasbuig Mac 'Illeathain, before 1830.
193 *UC*, p. 152, 'Oran do Lochiall'.
194 Thomas Sinton 1906, p. 103, by Calum Dubh nam Protaigean for Captain Gillies MacPherson circa 1820.
195 *ibid*, p. 245, by Calum Dubh nam Protaigean for Eoghan MacPhearsain, 1769.
196 *ibid*, p. 294, by Duncan Fraser (am Breabair Mòr) on the death Colonel Duncan MacPherson, 1817.
197 *OIL*, l. 1816, 'Òran do Shir Dòmhnall Shléite'.

...and oak:

Cha bu chrìon-choille sgàileach
Ach na daragan àrda...[198]

It was no withered unsubstantial forest
But the lofty oaks...

Lùb e 'n gallan bu fhine
Dh'fhàs de'n darach bu daingne...[199]

You bent the finest sapling
Which grew of the most steadfast oak...

Ghearr e 'choille 'na h-òigead
Crann de'n darach, barr-meòir as a' chraoibh...[200]

He hewed the forest in its youth
A branch of the oak, top-branch from the tree...

Thuit an daragan àrd...[201]
The tall oakling fell...

Dh'fhàs e 'n lios nan craobhan rìomhach
Mar dharaig àrd nan gallan dìreach...[202]

He grew in the garden of the beautiful trees
Like a tall oakling of the straight shoots...

...and other trees are sometimes encountered:

Gun droigheann, gun chrìonach,
Gun chritheann, gun chrìon-fhàs,
Ach geugan ro phrìseil...[203]

Without blackthorn, without bad wood
Without aspen, without bad growth,
But very precious branches...

Cha d'fhàs mi riamh 'am chrìonaich chrithinn...[204]
I have never turned into a withered branch of aspen...

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198 Thomas Sinton 1906, p. 113, by Archibald MacDonald for Othaichear na Cùil.

199 *ibid*, p. 242, by Calum Dubh nam Protaigean for Eoghan MacPhearsain, 1769. Note that the adjective *fine* is a borrowing of the English word 'fine', and not a form of the Gaelic *fionn*, which the rhyme with *rinn e* in the previous line demonstrates.

200 *ibid*, p. 260, on the death of Lachlann MacPhearsain.

201 Iain MacIllean 1818, p. 142, 'Cumhadh do Shìm Òg Mhòrthir', by Alastair Mac Chionmhuinn.

202 Adam Watson 1983, p. 34, 'Càrn na Cuimhne'.

203 *BL*, p. 111, 'Marbhrann do Shir Iain', † 1716, by Iain Mac Ailein Mhic Iain.

204 Malcolm MacFarlane 1908, p. 3, 'Bàs Dhiarmaid O Duimhne' (conflated text).

One of the most complete surviving tree lists is contained in one of the longest string of metaphors occuring in Scottish Gaelic poetry,[205] in the elegy composed by Sìleas na Ceapaich for Alasdair MacDonald of Glengarry who died in 1721:

Bu tu 'n t-iubhar thar gach coillidh
Bu tu 'n darach daingean làidir
Bu tu 'n cuileann 's bu tu 'n draigheann
Bu tu 'n t-abhall molach blàthmhor
Cha robh do dhàimh ris a' chritheann
Na do dhligheadh ris an fheàrna;
Cha robh bheag ionnad de'n leamhan
Bu tu leannan nam ban àlainn...[206]

You were the yew above every forest
You were the mighty steadfast oak
You were the holly, you were the blackthorn
You were the rough-barked flowered apple tree
You had no relationship with the aspen
Or any alliance with the alder
There was none of the elm in you
You were the darling of beautiful women...

Professor Watson took *leamhan* to mean the lime tree 'whose wood is soft',[207] rather than the native elm, and Ó Baoill has followed his advice. I believe that Watson has made a mistake in choosing the lime over the elm. The lime is not a native tree to Britain and is reported to have been introduced to England from Germany in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.[208] The earliest reference to it in the Scottish Highlands regards the avenue of lime trees at Taymouth called 'The Cathedral,' attributed by one writer to that pioneer of Highland forestry, Sir Duncan Campbell (*Donnchadh Dubh a' Churraic*).[209] Another reference to the first lime tree in the Highlands again points to Taymouth, where there was said to be 'one of the oldest limes, probably planted about 1660',[210] and Fergusson similarly claims that the first lime was introduced into Scotland at Taymouth in 1664.[211] The lime does not seem to have made further progress in the Highlands until at least late in the

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205 John MacInnes 1978, p. 480.
206 *BSC*, l. 847-854.
207 *BG*, p. 297.
208 L. J. F. Brimble 1948, p. 151.
209 Rev. William Gillies 1938, p. 141. See Chapter Three for more on his forestry work. See also Mark Anderson 1967, p. 261.
210 Mark Anderson 1967, p. 375.
211 Charles Fergusson 1878, p. 146.

eighteenth century. Even Lowland lairds were still sending people outside the country when they wanted to acquire lime seed for forestry projects in the early eighteenth century.[212]

The elm was, on the other hand, a native tree placed by the law tracts in the 'commoners' division. Although it was not one of the predominant species in the Highlands, it could be found particularly in oak forests,[213] such as those in Glengarry. It is important to remember that traditional Gaelic poetry makes use of symbolism on account of the well-established associations it conveys to a wide Gaelic audience. It is highly doubtful that the limes planted in a small number of locales (if there were any at all outside Taymouth) would have matured, been exploited and had their characteristics established in the minds of Sìleas' intended audience — the MacDonalds of Glengarry — in preference to the native elm by 1724.

The only deviance Sìleas makes from the old Gaelic tree scheme is to associate Alasdair with the *draigheann* [blackthorn], which was a tree under the 'lower division' in the old classification. Sileas seems to have exploited its connotations of fierceness, such as are reflected in proverbs about the *dris* [bramble] (discussed above). The blackthorn occurs in this sense in Willam Ross's praise of Sir Hector of Gairloch, of whom he says: '*Gur droigheann ri do dhùsgadh thu* [you are a blackthorn when aroused].'[214] Furthermore, that the blackthorn had 'elevated' status in some contexts is displayed by its inclusion in a list of trees not to be burned, many noble trees amongst them.[215] It also appears in association with Lugh.[216]

Even brief allusions to wood and trees in Gaelic literature can imply praise or dispraise according to the types of trees mentioned. The wood from which the coffin of a nobleman is made may be explicitly named to imply his nobility through association with the wood:

> *'N ciste ghiuthais chaol bhàn...*[217]
> In a narrow white kist of pine...

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212 Mark Anderson 1967, p. 605.

213 F. Fraser Darling and J. Morton Boyd 1969, p. 185. See Hugh Cheape 1993, p. 52, for elm growing in the oak forests of Clanranald, and William J. Watson 1926, pp. 119, 223, for the elm occurring in Gaelic place-names.

214 William Ross 1937, p. 10, l. 35.

215 Given in 'Aideadh Ferghusa', in *Silva Gadelica*. See Raghnall MacilleDhuibh 1996a.

216 Brian Ó Cuiv 1955, §7.

217 *OIL*, l. 2043, 'Cumha do Ghill-easbuig na Ceapaich'. I have changed the inflection of the adjectives so that they refer to the kist rather than the wood itself, unlike the interpretation in *OIL*.

Is fuar an nochd air an darach do chreubh...[218]
Your corpse is cold tonight on the oak...

The naming of noble trees in the woodlands of a laird praise him by implication of his intimate association with his land (to be further discussed in Chapter Four):

Gur ceutach do choille
'S gach doire mu'n cuairt dhuit...
Le'n àrd chrainn ghiubhais
Darach 's iubhar ri'n gualainn...[219]

Lovely is your wood
And every grove round about you...
With their tall trees of Scots pine
Oak and yew to their shoulders...

The connotations of the tree 'caste system' occasionally appear in Gaelic oral narrative. The marriage of a couple was traditionally proposed in a ceremony called a *rèiteach*, in which the 'best-man' would attempt to negotiate with the father of the woman on behalf of the suitor. Rather than directly ask for her hand, however, the entire transaction was couched in symbolic terms usually relating to the occupation of the woman's father. In the following tale, Macvicar of Dail-chruithneachd's son is hoping to win the hand of Mackellar of Mam's daughter and the 'best-man' tries to negotiate the marriage deal by describing the couple as though they were wooden beams:

Thuirt bean an taigh, 'Ach bidh fios agamsa, an toiseach, mu'n òl mi, car son a tha mi dol a dh'òl.'
Thuirt Fear na Dail-chruithneachd, 'Tha sinn a' togail taigh aig an Dail-chruithneachd, agus tha sinn a' cur lànan ann. Tha an darna taobh de'n lànan againn agus chuala sinn gun robh aig Fear a' Mhàim craobh a dhèanadh leth-taobh eile de'n lànan, agus thàinig sinn a fheuch an tugadh e dhuinn i.'
Thuirt Mac Eallair a' Mhàim, 'Cia dè am fiodh a tha anns an taobh lànain a tha agad cheana?'
Thuirt Mac a Bheachdair, 'Tha darach.'
Thuirt Mac Eallair a' Mhàim, 'Is e uinnseann am fiodh a tha anns an taobh lànain a tha agamsa agus cha fhreagair an dà sheòrsa fiodh' do chèile. Mairidh an darach mòran nas faide na 'n t-uinnseann.'
Thuirt Mac a Bheachdair na Dail-Chruithneachd, 'Mairidh an t-uinnseann rè tiom fhada cuideachd ma thèid dìon a chumail air, ach chan eil dùil agam nach e darach a tha anns an taobh lànain a tha agadsa cuideachd...'.[220]

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218 *BG*, l. 522, 'Marbhrann do Mhaighstir Seumas Beattie'.
219 Iain MacGhigair 1801, pp. 58-9, 'Do Rhidaire na h-Apun'.
220 John Dewar 1964, p. 62. The original Gaelic text is taken from MS. Vol. 1, p. 53.

The woman of the house said, 'But I shall before I drink, at the outset, why I am going to drink.'

The laird of Dail-chruithneachd, 'We are building a house in Dail-chruinneachd and putting a couple in it; we have one side of the couple, and we have heard that Mackellar of Mam has a tree that would make the other side of the couple; so we have come to try whether he will give it to us.'

Mackellar of Màm said, 'What kind of wood is the half of the couple that you already have?'.

'It is oak,' said Macvicar.

'The couple that I have,' said Mackellar of Màm, 'is ash, and these two woods do not complement each other. Oak lasts much longer than ash.'

'Ash,' said Macvicar of Dail-Chruithneachd, 'lasts long also, if it is kept dry, but I rather suspect that your half-couple is oak too...'

While Mackellar's occupation and background are never explained, he clearly has a knowledge of the properties of wood which he exploits in order to infer that he wants his wood — that is, his daughter — to be well taken care of.

In a version of the famous story of Conall, the smith's daughter dreams of her conception of a child by the king in terms of the noble fir-wood:

'Chunnaic mi aisling an siud, gathan giubhais a' fàs a cridhe an rìgh, fear a m' chridhe fhìn, 's iad a' snaomadh 'na chèile.'

'Sin leanabh mic an dèidh a ghineach eadar thusa is mise a- nochd.'[221]

'I had a dream there, (that there was) a shoot of Scots pine growing out of the King's heart and one out of my own heart and they were entangling each other.'

'That was a son which has been conceived between you and me tonight.'

The Arboreal Panegyric Code

The heroic qualities enumerated in the conventions of the Gaelic Panegyric Code were not just listed in an abstract form, but given concrete shape as kennings and metaphors. Items from the natural world, as well as historical characters and events, could be employed as symbols and precedents with which to compare the subject of praise or dispraise.[222]

Many of the features of this rhetorical code have already been discussed above: the utilisation of words whose semantic range covers trees and humans; associating the hero with wooden items implying nobility or warrior-prowess, i.e., boats, weapons, and such; employing imagery which illustrates parallels between humans and trees in shape, colour, scent and

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[221] *PTWH* vol. 1, p. 506.

[222] *ibid*, pp. 457-8; *CGP*, pp. 17-9.

taste; invoking the characteristics of the ancient sacred trees; comparing and contrasting the human subject with trees of noble or non-noble connotation.

The Gaelic Panegyric Code 'works with this central symbol: the warrior who is protector and rewarder'.[223] Although I have discussed the symbolism of the *bile* already, it is worth emphasising with examples the frequency with which trees appear as a protector and guardian:

> *Craobh dhìon' d'a luchd-muinntir...*[224]
> A sheltering tree to his people...
>
> *Craobh a dhìdean ar còrach...*[225]
> Tree of protection for our rights...
>
> *Fo a sgàile bidh fasga[dh] is blàths...*[226]
> Under his shade is shelter and warmth...

Further symbols and characteristics appear in the Gaelic rhetorical system which require attention in order to complete our understanding of the metaphorical use of trees.

To emphasise his top-most position in society, the subject is often described as being the 'tallest tree' or the 'fruit above all others'. The height of the tree emphasises its maturity and its overpowering size, while the fruit from the top of the tree was believed to be the sweetest and most desirable:

> *Chraobh as àirde 's an doire thu...*[227]
> You are the tallest tree in the grove...
>
> *Meas bharr barr na craoibhe...*[228]
> Fruit from the top of the tree...
>
> *Meur mullach na craoibhe...*[229]
> Top branch of the tree...

The tree is described as being straight and erect. Not only does this imply that the wood of the tree is 'useful' (since it will make large timber), but this quality also has moral associations (discussed below):

> *Gu deas dìreach o d' mhullach gu d' bhonn...*[230]

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223 John MacInnes 1978, p. 495.
224 *BL* i, p. 60, 'Òran do Chatriona Nic Gilleain'.
225 *SJM*, line 2296, 'Marbhrann do Shir Seumas MacDhòmhnaill', 1766.
226 *UC*, p. 152, 'Òran do Lochiall', by Gille na Ciotaig.
227 *BL*, p. 206, 'Òran do Shir Eachann', Mairearad Nighean Lachainn, 1751.
228 Màiri Nic-a-Phearsoin 1891, p. 308, 'An nighean dubh ghuanach'.
229 Dòmhnall MacLeòid 1811, p. 15, 'Òran do Eòin Tormoid MacLeòid'.

Goodly, straight from your top to your bottom...

Gu h-ùrail dìreach dosrach...[231]
Fresh straight leafy...

Descriptions of foliage and blossoms of the tree, as well as explicit mention of its fertility and fruitfulness, can be included. A society which believes in hereditary characteristics and in which professions are hereditary will of course be concerned about reproduction:

'S ann a bhios i fo dhuilleach a ghnàth
'S i 'cinntinn gu h-àrd le mòr theas...
Air gach gèig, bhios ag àrach deagh mheas...[232]

It is always covered in leaves
As it grows upward lustily...
On every branch which raises excellent fruit...

Maide 'dh'fhàs 'na chraoibh thoraidh
Fo bhlàth onarach àlainn...[233]

A rod which has become a fertile tree
In beautiful honourable bloom...

E mar chraobh mhullaich dhuillich bhlàthail
Dh'fhàs gu h-ùrar dosrach làidir;
Dh'fhàs gu geugach meurach cràcach...[234]

He is like a leafy blossoming top-most branch of a tree
Which has grown flourishingly, strongly, bushily
Which has grown full of branches, twigs and foliage...

The tree is fragrant. This may correspond in human terms to praise of cleanliness and fragrance, which even the non-nobles in Gaelic society would have been mindful of and attempted to achieve as best they could. Most of the cleansing agents and perfumes used by the people would have been natural items available in their proximity, and some of them were tree products.[235]

'S am preas cùbhraidh...[236]
And the fragrant thicket...

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230 *UC*, p. 151, 'Òran do Lochiall'.
231 Iain Thornber 1983, p. 8, 'Mo nighean chruinn chuimir thu', by Donald MacKinnon.
232 *UC*, 'Òran do Lochiall', p. 152.
233 *CD*, 'Creach na Ciadaoin', l. 781-2.
234 Adam Watson 1983, p. 34, 'Càrn na Cuimhne'.
235 John Dixon 1886, p. 131, for example, describes the use of elm bark for shampoo.
236 *EB*, l. 736, 'Uam-s' tha ràitinn', by Anndra Mac an Easbuig, c. 1674-87.

'S iubhar caoin na craoibh cùbhraidh...[237]
And gentle yew of the fragrant tree...

The tree is described as sappy, or wet with moisture, which has sexual overtones for the human subject:

Dealt an t-samhraidh mu 'blàthaibh...[238]
Moisture of the summer about its blossoms...

'S na gallain àlainn fo'n driùchd Chèitin...[239]
With the beautiful saplings in May's dew...

Gheibhteadh snodhach 's an Fhaoilleach...[240]
Sap could be found (in the tree) in deep winter...

Blood, or even 'wine-blood' is ascribed to the tree, often in describing the ancestry which runs through its 'veins'. This may, in part, be an analogy between the sap of the tree and the blood of humans, but it is useful to remember also that wine was made from the sap of some trees (to be discussed in Chapter Three).

an plannta maoth d' fhuil Olbhuir...[241]
The tender plant of the blood of Oliver...

'Chraobh a b'ùire de'n fhìon-fhuil...[242]
The most youthful tree of the wine-blood...

'S fuil rìoghail nan Stiùbhart
'Ruith an dùthchas 's a' chraoibh...[243]

And the royal blood of the Stewarts
Running hereditarily in the tree...

The tree is commonly described as *ùr*, which has connotations of purity, freshness and youth.

crann as ùire dh'fhàs troimh thalamh...[244]
The freshest branch that broke through the soil...

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237 *AD*, p. 83, 'Òran do Choirneal Mac'ic'Alasdair'.
238 *BG*, l. 627, 'Marbhrann do Mhr. Seumas Beattie', Eoghan MacLachlainn, 1822.
239 Iain MacIllean 1818, p. 142, 'Cumhadh do Shìm Òg Mhòrthir', Alastair Mac Chionmhuinn.
240 *D*, p. 18, Cumha Alastair MhicColla, 1746.
241 *CGP*, p. 42, §5, to William MacLeod, 1705.
242 *BL* i, p. 53, 'Cumha do Lachainn MacGilleathain, Triath Chola', † 1687, by Catriona MacGilleathain.
243 Thomas Sinton 1906, p. 308, by Donald Macrae to his wife.
244 *BG*, l. 6879, 'An Duanag Ullamh'.

A chraobh ùr nam meur pailt...[245]
O pure tree of many branches...

'S tu 'm faillean ùr o'n ghrunnd a dh'fhàs...[246]
You are the young sapling which grew from the ground...

It may be emphasised that the subject is not *crìon* [rotted, defective wood], but good, solid, strong, healthy wood:

Cha b'e crìonach na dìge...[247]
He was not the rotting foliage of the ditch...

Cha b'e crìonach nan crann...[248]
He was not the withered one of the branches...

The tree is mature and has deep roots. In human terms, this could imply that the subject has the expertise and steadfastness of a leader:

Abhall uasal farsaing freumhach...[249]
Noble expansive rooted apple tree...

Cha chraobh chuire, cha phlannta...[250]
He is no transplanted tree, no plantling...

Dh'fhàs freumhach smiorail làidir...[251]
Who has grown full of roots, pithy and strong...

'S a liuthad freumh mòr as na chinnich do chreubh...[252]
Many a great root from which your body has grown...

Sometimes the roots are placed in a specific locale:

Craobh a thuinich rè aimsir
Fhreumhaich bun ann an Albainn...[253]

A tree which has established itself with time
Which has rooted its trunk in Scotland...

a bhláth aibhle ón úir Íligh...[254]
O apple blossom from the Islay soil...

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245 *AD*, p. 19, 'Òran do Dhòmhnull Camshron Triath Loch Iall'.
246 Iain Thornber 1983, p. 25, 'Òran Molaidh', by Peter MacGregor.
247 *D*, p. 10, '[Cumha] Fear Bhail-Obhraidh'.
248 George Henderson 1898, p. 181, 'Iain Ghlinne Cuaich'.
249 *BG*, l. 6879, 'An Duanag Ullamh'.
250 *EB*, l. 136, 'A' Chnò Shamhna'.
251 Thomas Sinton 1906, p. 116, on the marriage of Mr. J. E. B. Baillie.
252 *ibid*, p. 254, for William Mackintosh.
253 *EB*, l. 132-3, 'A' Chnò Shamhna'.
254 Ronald Black 1973, 'Saoth liom do chor a Cholla', §12.

Am freumh a chinnich gu fìor-ghlan
Shuas an Coir' an t-Sìth as a barr...[255]

The root(s) that grew truly well
High up from the top of Coir' an t-Sìth...

'S e 'm fiùran grinn e stoc Dhun-ìan...[256]
He is the elegant sapling of the stock of Dun-ìan...

Mar shlat abhaill o'n Chùil thu...[257]
You are like the apple-sapling from Coul...

An Rathasair bha an t-slat fhial...[258]
The generous rod was in Raasay...

or growing from a specific ancestor:

Géag chumhra do chinn ó Chonn...[259]
Fragrant branch which grew from Conn...

'S a fhreumhaich air Clann Dòmhnuill...[260]
Who grew from roots in Clan Donald...

Gallan-mullach nan Tòiseach gu lèir...[261]
Top-branch of all of the Mackintoshes...

The tree is able to withstand the cold weather and harsh winter, often expressed in terms of not bending or not losing its sap or colour. In human terms, such metaphors emphasise the resilience and hardiness of the subject:

Gheibhteadh snodhach 's an Fhaoilleach...[262]
Sap could be found (in it) in the deep winter...

A' chraobh nach aom le sianntaibh...[263]
The tree that doesn't submit to the elements...

...nach cailleadh snuadh le fuachd gaillinn...[264]
...which would not lose its hue with the cold of a storm...

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255 *D*, p. 11, '[Cumha] Fear Bhail-Obhraidh'.
256 Thomas Sinton 1906, p. 116.
257 William Matheson 1965, p. 181.
258 *BG*, l. 6145, 'Tuirseach Dhuinne Ri Port', Alasdair MacCoinnich.
259 Angus Matheson 1964, §23, 'mo chean do-chonnairc a-réir'.
260 Thomas Sinton 1906, p. 304, by Archibald MacDonald on the death of Lieut-Colonel Ranald MacDonald, 1848.
261 *ibid*, p. 254, for William MacDonald by Calum Dubh.
262 *D*, p. 18, '[Cumha] Alastair MacCholla, Mac'ic Raonuill a thuit Latha-Chuil-Fhodair'.
263 *AD*, p. 166, 'Òran do Shiosalach Shrath-ghlaise'.
264 Dòmhnall MacLeòid 1811, p. 34, 'Marbhrann do Dhòmhnull Dòmhnullach'.

Cha dochair gaoth a' chuain thu...[265]
The sea wind doesn't injure you...

Dh'aindeoin doinionnan Faoillich, na Màirt
Cha chrìon i, cha searg, is cha bhris...[266]

Despite the storms of January or March
It won't wither, dry up or break...

The word *buaidh* is commonly associated with the tree. It has a number of related associations, revolving around the idea of the sacred powers which confer various qualities and characteristics, sacred and military, and which entitle a person to victory in battle. There is no single word in English which invokes the same semantic fields, and so I have settled upon the word 'powers' for my translations:

...A lùb abhall nam buadh...[267]
Which bent the apple-tree of the powers...

A chraobh-chosgair bhuadhach àigh...[268]
O powerful triumphant tree of victory...

a gheug nam buadh do'n cliù gach uaisle...[269]
O branch of the powers who is renowned for all nobility...

The stripping and destruction of the tree is frequently used as a metaphor for death, destruction or dejection, describing the ruin of all of the features of the tree which have been described above.

Gur mi a' chraobh air a rùsgadh
Gun chnothan gun ùbhlan
'S a snodhach 's a rùsg air a fàgail...[270]

I am the tree which has been stripped bare
Without nuts or apples
And the sap and the bark have gone...

Oirnne thàinig i cas
Fhrois an snodhach o'r slat...[271]

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265 Iain Thornber 1983, p. 8, 'Mo Nighean Chruinn Chuimir Thu', by Donald MacKinnon.
266 *UC*, 'Òran do Lochiall', p. 152.
267 *GSMM*, l. 183, 'Marbhrann do Fhear na Comraich'.
268 *D*, p. 163, 'Deoch-Slàinte Mhic 'ic Alasdair'.
269 William Matheson 1965, p. 181, 'Òran leis a' bhàrd Murchadh Mac Mhathain...'.
270 *OIL*, 'Cumha Aonghuis Mhic Raghnaill Òig na Ceapaich', † 1640, l. 86-8.
271 *EB*, l. 1028-9, 'Òran do Dhòmhnall Fear Bhròlais', † 1725, by Dòmhnull Bàn.

It has suddenly come upon us:
The sap has been drained from our sapling...

Dh'fhalbh a' chraobh 's a cuid duillich
Gun thuit am bun 's gun do chrìon e...[272]

The tree and its foliage have left
The trunk has fallen and it has withered...

No mar chraoibh air a rùsgadh
Bhiodh gun duilleach gun ùbhlan
Ach gu glan air a spùinneadh
Is an stoc mar bu dùth dhà
A' sìor-chrìonadh 's a' sùghadh
Ann an toiseach na Dùbhlachd
'S cha chuir Earrach no Lùnastal blàth oirr'...[273]

Or like a tree stripped bare
That would be without leaves or apples
But completely ruined
And the stock, as was natural for it,
Continually withering and drying up
In early winter
And neither spring nor autumn will cause her to blossom...

If the subject of the elegy was young, the sense of loss and tragedy is often heightened by describing how the tree was just barely blossoming, or didn't even have the chance to mature:

Thuit m' fhiùran, duilleach fo bhlàth
gun fuireach ri fàs a mheas...
Ùr fo bhlàth gun dol air ghais...[274]

My sapling, with foliage in blossom, has fallen
Without waiting for its fruit to grow...
Newly bloomed without yet withering...

E gun abachadh meas' air
Ach air briseadh fo cheud-bharr...[275]

He did not yet have mature fruit
But his first fruits had just broken out...

Am planntas deas dàicheil
Nach d'fhàs ach 'na ghèig...[276]

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272 *FFSU*, p. 103, 'Marbhrann do fhear Àirigh Mhuilinn', Aonghus Caimbeul, 1809.
273 *NBT*, p. 51, 'Cumha do Mhr. Eamunn Mac-Cuinn', Iain Mac Ailein.
274 From a lament by Murdoch MacKenzie, given in John MacInnes 1978, p. 477.
275 *GSMM*, l. 615-6.
276 *BSC*, l. 366-7.

The fine handsome plant
Which only grew to be sapling...

Níor b' adhbhar bróin ubhal abuidh theachd o m' chrann
Achd 's béud, ochóin, a chraobh do chrathadh go lér
'S a thoradh glas...[277]

It was no reason for sorrow, a ripe apple coming from my branch
But pity, the tree which is completely shaken
While its fruit was still unripe...

When the subject of praise is a female, MacInnes explains that 'A girl may be referred to... in the tree kennings used of the warrior: *bile, craobh, geug, slat de'n abhall*, with variations and extensions'.[278] The elements of the 'Arboreal Panegyric Code' that are associated with fertility, purity, youth and beauty are particularly drawn upon, sometimes with an implicitly sexual undertone, such as:

'S tu 'n drùchd a shileas gu caoin
'S tu 'n gallan a lùb fo ùbhlaibh milis...[279]

You are the dew that gently flows
You are the sapling that is bent by sweet apples...

'S i ùrar, dìreach, dosrach, caomh,
'S a h-ùbhlan maoth a' fàs oirre...[280]

She is young, straight, flourishing, gentle
With tender apples growing on her...

Bu tu craobh-ubhal a' ghàraidh
Nuair a sgaoileadh i 'blàithean fo'n driùchd...[281]

You were the apple tree of the garden
When it opened its blossoms in the dew...

This same sort of imagery, only more explicit, is echoed in the Táin Bó Cuailnge: *'is í no dáiled ubla fírchubra dar sedlach a léned fair...* It was she who gave him fragrant apples over the bosom of her tunic.' This imagery, particularly in relation to apples, will be relevant in the discussion of the song *Craobh nan Ubhal* below.

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277 Colm Ó Baoill 1988, p. 140. Robert Kirk's lament for his wife, 1680.
278 John MacInnes 1978, p. 468.
279 Rev. A. MacLean Sinclair 1881, p. 313, 'Òran Gaoil', Rev. James MacGregor.
280 Gilleaspuig Caimbeul 1851, p. 14, 'Òran Molaidh do Nighinn Uasail Àraid'.
281 *NBT*, p. 270, 'Gaol an t-Saighdear', Iain Mac Lachann na h-Urbhaig.

Tree Satire

It is unfortunate for the study of Gaelic poetry as a whole that such a small body of satire has come down to us. There are occasional references by the eighteenth and nineteenth century collectors and editors to satires being unpleasant and distasteful and hence, it is inferred, unworthy of recording and transmission. Corpuses of poetry written down by the poets themselves — such as Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair — or recorded directly from the recitation of poets — such as Donnchadh Bàn or Rob Donn — probably best reflect the role and context of satire in a poet's body of work.

The metaphor of person as tree has been discussed above, and I have shown how pervasive this manner of speech is. The most common proverb of this tree symbolism is frequently used in dispraise, such as:

Ach ged a sheallte h-uile doire
'Cha robh coille riamh gun chrìonach';
'S tha fios aig an t-saoghal uile
Nach bi choill uile co-dhìreach...[282]

But even if every grove was looked at
There was never a wood free of rotten timber
And everyone in the world knows
That the whole wood cannot be equally straight...

Am fad as beò 's an fhìonain e
Tha craobh chrìonaich aca-san...[283]

For as long as he lives in the vineyard
They possess a rotten stick...

Satire and dispraise generally works on the same principle as praise in the Gaelic Panegyric Code, except that images and symbols with negative associations are implicated with the subject of the invective.

The bareness, barrenness and ugliness of the tree are most frequently described in these satires, although the reverse of any of the features listed above can also be found, such as lack of height, straightness, sap or roots:

'S tusa 'chraobh tha 'n dèidh seacadh
Gun chairt gun mheangain gun mheuran
Gun snodhach gun bhrìgh gun duilleach
Gun rùsg gun uiread nam freumhan...[284]

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[282] *ODB*, l. 5704-7, 'Òran Iain Faochag'.
[283] *ODB*, l. 5110-1, 'Òran do'n Inbhir'.
[284] *ODB*, l. 5708-11, 'Òran Iain Faochag'.

You are the tree which has been blasted
Without bark, twigs or branches
Without sap, substance or leaves
Without rind or even any roots...

'S tu 'chraobh ghrodlaich air crìonadh
Làn mosgain is fhìneag
A dh'fhàs croganach ìosal
Goirid crotach neo-dhìreach...[285]

You are the rotten, withered tree
Full of decay and microbes
Which has become scraggy and stunted
Short, hump-backed, twisted...

Craobh rùisgt' de'n abhall bhreugach
Gun mheas gun chliù gun cheutaidh...[286]

Naked tree of the orchard of lies
Without fruit, honour or handsomeness...

The last example contains a homonymic pun exploiting two interpretations of *meas*, one meaning 'fruit' and another meaning 'respect' or 'esteem'.

Examples have been given above of non-noble trees — such as alder — being used as a means for insult and dispraise. An eighteenth-century satire on Dr. Samuel Johnson has images which directly correspond to those in Sìleas na Ceapaich's praise poem to Alasdair of Glengarry (discussed above) in reverse. It was composed as a negative image to Sìleas' poem, and as such, it also enumerates members of the tree hierarchy:

Cha bu tu 'n draigheann na 'n cuileann
Na 'n t-iubhar fulannach làidir
Chan eil mìr annad de'n darach
No de sheileach dearg nam blàran
Tha 'chuid as motha dhìot de chrithinn
Ìngnean sgithich is làmhan feàrna
Tha do cheann gu lèir de leamhan
Gu h-àraidh do theanga 's do chàirean...[287]

You would not be the blackthorn or the holly
Or the strong, hardy yew
There isn't a trace of the oak in you
Or of the red willow of the fields

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285 *ODB*, l. 1325-8, 'Òran do'n Tàillear'.
286 *OIL*, l. 703-4, 'Cumha Mhontrois', 1650.
287 *E*, p. 320, 'Òran do'n Olladh Shasgunnach'.

The greater part of you is made of aspen
Hawthorn talons and alder hands
Your entire head is made of elm
Especially your tongue and your gums...

Wood has great utility besides any of its purely symbolic connotations. It, therefore, is a real insult to say that the 'stuff' one is made of — typically phrased in terms of wood terminology — is useless:

Cha dèan saor gu bràch
Feum d'a bun, no 'barr
Fiùbhaidh chrìon gun stàth...[288]

No joiner will ever make
Use of her trunk or her branches:
(She is) rotten, useless timber.

Intimate Links between Individuals and Trees

There seem to be many indications in Gaelic poetry, story and tradition of a belief in an intimate relationship between particular human beings and particular trees, as of a twinning, pairing or equivalence between individuals and trees. This belief may be a folk-reflection of the reliance of people upon trees and wood-products and the necessity to treat trees, like any crucial resource, with care and consideration.

The common folkloristic motif known as the 'life-token' is defined thus:

> In widespread European and Asiatic folk belief, folktale and traditional ballads, an object (or animal, plant, etc) either chosen by or born with a person, which manifests in some way the fact that he is in danger, may die, or is dead... In European folklore, it is often a tree that withers and dies. The life of the hero is almost invariably co-existent with the life-token... In Ireland the life-token is called *cómhshaoghal*...[289]

The tree is in fact such a common life-token that the term 'birth-tree' was coined to describe it.[290] Although it appears in the folklore of other peoples, it seems to be characteristic of Gaelic folklore, judging from the Stith Thompson index at least.

In the tale *A' Mhaighdean Mhara*,[291] the three sons of a woman are 'connected to' three trees growing behind her house, and she is told that *'bidh*

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288 Alastair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, 'Mì-mholadh Móraig'.
289 Maria Leach 1950, 'life-token'. See also 'birth-tree'. Cross-cultural examples in Alexander Porteous 1928, pp. 182-3.
290 See Stith Thompson motifs E761.3, F979.11, T589.3.
291 *PTWH* vol. 1, p. 156; see also p. 164.

na craobhan 'nan samhladh: 'nuair a bhàsaicheas a h-aon de na mic seargaidh tè de na craobhan [The trees will be a sign: when one of the sons dies, one of the trees will shrivel up]'. The death of two successive sons is indicated by the withering of two trees. The trees regain life with the sons when they are magically resuscitated at the end of the story. Campbell confirms that other Argyllshire versions of the tale include this tree motif.[292]

The tale *Cailleach na Riobaig*[293] has the very same motif, except that each of the three trees also has a well which goes dry on the death of the sons. In this tale as well, the death of each son is heralded by the withering of a tree, and the next son goes out to try his hand. The trees are again described as reviving when the sons are magically resuscitated at the end of the tale.

I believe that *Cailleach na Riobaig* has been embellished with the birth-tree motif borrowed from other tales, possibly even *A' Mhaighdean Mhara*, as a simpler version involving only a single hero and without the treasure of this tale appears fairly commonly among Gaelic tales.[294]

A tale closely related to *A' Mhaighdean Mhara* called *An t-Iasgair* [the Fisherman] gives the motif in a fuller form:

> *...a' chraobh ud anns a' ghàradh, bidh i fo shnodhach is fo dhuilleach bho fhoghar gu samhradh is bho earrach gu geamhradh gus am faigh mise am bàs is nuair a gheibh mise am bàs tuitidh an snodhach dhi.*[295]
>
> ...yonder tree in the garden, it will have bud and blossom from autumn to summer and from spring to winter until I die, and when I die the buds will fall off of it.

There are instances of this motif carrying real weight in Gaelic folk-life: 'At Finlarig Castle, near Killin, in Perthshire, are several trees, believed to be linked with the lives of certain individuals, connected by family ties with the ruined fortress.'[296] This particular instance is probably connected with the associations between trees and dynasties, to be discussed in Chapter 2.

This tradition, harkening back to the distant Gaelic past, suggests the symbolic 'rooting' of the heroes of a popular tale in tree form:

> On the west side on the upper reaches of Loch Etive there is the site of an orchard which was known as *Garadh Chlann Uisne*... Tradition claims that at one

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[292] *ibid*, p. 167.
[293] *MWHT* vol 2, p. 378.
[294] See *ibid*, p. 314, for a partial list.
[295] John F. Campbell and George Henderson 1911, p. 158. Given in English as incident 29.
[296] James Mackinlay 1893, p. 236.

> time there were four trees bearing the names of Deirdire, Naois, Ardan and Aillean, and that these gradually disappeared until only one was left. The surviving tree was known as *Craobh Ubhal Chlann Uisne*...[297]

This may be the same tree as that referred to in the proverb *'Craobh de dh'abhall a ghàraidh aig taobh Loch Eite agus Mac an t-Saoir Ghlinn Nodha, dà thuathanach as sine 'n Albainn*... The apple tree of the orchard on Loch Etive side and Macintyre of Glennoe, the two oldest farmers in Scotland.'[298] The equating of the apple tree with *Clann Uisne* would help explain why the tree is referred to as a person.

The tradition was still active in *Bliadhna Thearlaich*: 'Today the "Seven Men of Moidart" — seven huge oak trees — mark the spot where he landed.'[299]

There is also a motif common in oral narrative and ballads throughout Britain and Ireland of a tree which grows out of a person's grave. Especially popular is the motif of the two trees which grow out of the graves of lovers and intertwine with each other thereafter.[300] Although the ultimate source of this motif may be impossible to trace, the earliest record of a variant of this is in an Old Irish tale of the 10th or 11th century:

> Baile died of grief... And a yew tree grew out of his grave, and the likeness of Baile's head was in its branches... Ailinn fell dead... and out of her grave there grew an apple-tree. After seven years it was a strong tree, and the likeness of Ailinn's head was in its branches.[301]

In this particular tale, writing tablets are later made of the wood of the two trees, and when they are within close proximity of each other, the tablets spring inseparably together. The functional use of the wood, unromanticised conclusion and slightly more complex form leads me to believe that this is an earlier form of the tale than that of the two intertwined trees.

This motif continued to be very productive in Gaelic song and literature, as it may be found in a number of tales, such as *An Dà Chraoibh Ghaoil*[302] or in the prose conclusion, translated into flowery English, of a Gaelic Badenoch love ballad:

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297 Iain Carmichael, p. 11. See also Alexander Carmichael 1905, pp. 140-1.
298 Rev. A. MacLean Sinclair 1892, p. 291.
299 Calum MacLean 1975, p. 46.
300 Stith Thompson motif E631ff, Aarne-Thompson No. 966.
301 Myles Dillon 1946a, p. 28, 'Baile Binnbérlach Mac Buain'. See also the *Prose Dindsenchas*, §17.
302 *MWHT* vol. 1, p. 278. Tale localised in Kilmuir is also mentioned in NLS MS. 14990, p. 318.

> Out of the grave of each of these star-crossed lovers, sprang a tree, whose high overarching boughs, in the course of years were inter-locked in loving embrace above the church. So they long continued until, to the scandal of the country, a sordid churl cut them for the sake of the timber, which he coveted. It is hardly necessary to add that the miserable man never prospered afterwards. Anon, it became noised abroad that the mystic trees were springing up again...[303]

Tree Incarnations in Literature

Even beyond the intimate link discussed above, some literary figures and mytho-historical characters seem to be represented as being human incarnations of trees, or at least having an arboreal aspect of their being: 'tree-people'. This is first of all apparent in the names of early kings and heroes recorded in early records or Gaelic ancestral lore. Some tree terms seem to occur in Gaulish names,[304] and W. J. Watson comments that this was not uncommon amongst the Insular Celts: 'The Gaelic *fid*, now *fiodh*, and the Welsh *guid, gwydd*, are favorite elements in personal names.'[305] Examples such as *Fidach, Fidchuire* and *Iubar* [woody, planted-wood and yew] can be found amongst personal names in *Félire Óengusso Céli Dé* and there are Irish saints with names such as *Mac Caille* [the son of the wood], *Mac Cáirthinn* [the son of rowan] and *Mac Cuilinn* [the son of holly].[306]

The name *Iubhair* is often given as the name of Arthur's father in Gaelic tradition, and although it may be ultimately derived from the name Uther (exactly how is not yet clear),[307] it seems to confirm the naturalness of tree-names. It would be rather suitable for a man of royalty, given the yew's noble qualities. The lineage *sliochd Artúir mhic Iubhair* [the people of Arthur son of Uther] is given in a Campbell pedigree[308] and the Scottish Gaelic folktale Sir Uallabh O' Còrn begins: *'Bha Rìgh air Èirinn ris an abradh iad Ceann Artair Mac Iubhair* [There was a king over Ireland who they called King Arthur son of Uther]'.[309]

Trees and tree terms were sometimes used in the nick-names or titles of Gaels. A young chief of Glengarry of old was called *Alasdair na Coille*

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303 Thomas Sinton 1906, p. 45.
304 See *Gaulish Personal Names*, Evans, p. 291.
305 William J. Watson 1926, p. 115. See also Marged Haycock 1990, p. 303.
306 Donncha Ó Corráin and Fidelma Maguire 1981, p. 127; See also M. A. O'Brien 1973, §37.b and §44.c for these and other examples.
307 William Gillies 1982, pp. 50, 71.
308 Ronald Black 1973, p. 200.
309 John G. Campbell 1887, p. 69. See also William Gillies 1981, p. 49.

[Alastair of the forest][310] and the founder of the Braemar MacDonalds was called *Seumas a' Ghiuthais* [James of the pine] because he had spent many years living in the forest as a fugitive. Ewan Cameron, 5th of Camuserracht, was familiarly known in Gaelic as *Eòghann dubh an daraich* [Black-haired Ewan of the oak].[311]

Trees are implicated in several ways in the lore of Fraoch in Scottish Gaelic oral tradition, which continued on into the 20th century. First, of all, his name, *Fraoch Mac Fiodhach* [heather son of woody], suggests that he himself has some special tree, or at least vegetal, nature. He is given the task of collecting magical rowan berries from a tree which is guarded by a monster.[312] In the course of procuring the berries, Fraoch uproots the entire tree and seemingly takes it with him, pursued by the monster.

There is a tale entitled *Eoghan Craobh* in the manuscripts of John F. Campbell of Islay,[313] but while the title is tantalising, especially given the lore gathered around this personal and tribal name in Ireland,[314] the tale is barely legible and seems to go no further than the first page.

Another incomplete tale in this tale collection,[315] which is summarised by Campbell in English, seems to include a character of tree nature:

> ...a mythical old man is shut up in an oak tree, which grows in the court of the kings' palace; and when the king's son lets his ball roll into a split in the tree by chance, the old man tells the boy to fetch an axe and he will give him the ball, and so he gets out, and endows the Prince with power and valour... *Bodach na Craoibhe Mòire*.[316]

There were tales in the Gairloch area of a supernatural denizen of the forest called *Gille Dubh Locha Dring*. His haunts and manner of dress all point to his tree-nature:

> His haunts were in the extensive woods that still cluster round the southern end of [Loch Dring] and extend far up the side of the high ridge to the west of it.

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310 Alexander MacDonald 1928, p. 214.

311 Somerled MacMillan 1971, p. 24. This title may be connected with the Cameron plant badge, a topic to be discussed in Chapter Two.

312 Donald Meek 1984, p. 6, points out that this detail is not given in the earliest records of Fraoch and may be an innovation of no later than the fourteenth century. Further discussion on the rowan berries may be found in Chapter 3.

313 NLS MS 50.2.5, p. 249.

314 Francis John Byrne 1973, p. 182; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh 1980, p. 217.

315 NLS MS 50.1.11 f. 449. The text of the page that remains in the collection is given in *MWHT* vol. 2, p. 337.

316 *PTWH* vol 1, p. 60.

> There are grassy glades, dense thickets, and rocky fastnesses in these woods, that look just the places for fairies... The Gille Dubh was so named from the black colour of his hair; his dress, if dress it can be called, was of leaves of trees and green moss...[317]

I have located two printed tales in the Gaelic folktale corpus which are lengthier expositions of this theme.[318] The first, *Mac Ceatharnach na Coille*, was recorded in 1889 from a native of Ardnamurchan. The second, *Mac Duine Làidir na Coille*, was recorded in 1976 from a native of Cape Breton and resembles the first so closely that I consider it to be a later (and not quite as complete) version of the first.[319] In both of these stories, when the father dies, he tells the mother that she is pregnant, and that she is to plant the acorn clenched in his fist in a dirt-heap. At the same time that she bears her son, the seedling will appear out of the ground.

The twin born at the same time as the hero represents, according to some, the supra-natural character of the hero. The Rees brothers discuss this in the context of the animal twin motif:

> The supra-natural character of the incarnating spirit is also indicated by other motifs. Thunder peals when Cormac is born, and at the birth of certain saints a spring wells forth, a wood lights up, or a rod held in the mother's hand bursts into leaf and flower... Animals are born simultaneously with the hero... These animal correlatives of the hero may be said to symbolise the extra-human, otherworldly or unconscious ground of his nature...[320]

The hero in this story-set proves his ability to fend for himself and take on the world when he is able to uproot his 'twin-tree'. Thus, the life and condition of the tree and hero are not intertwined, and we are not dealing with the birth-tree life-token motif.

Some essential points of the tale need recounting to support my interpretation of the tale. The father hunts game and gathers wood in the wild forest, and is mortally wounded one day when felling a large oak. He manages to stagger home with the tree on his shoulder just in time to

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317 John Dixon 1886, pp. 160-1. See also Osgood Mackenzie, pp. 186-7; *MWHT* vol. 1, p. 480; *The People's Journal* March 27, 1915.

318 Rev. J. MacDougall 1891, pp. 187-221; Eòs MacNìll and Iain Seathach 1987, pp. 140-161. I have recently located but been unable to analyse a version in *The People's Journal* August 3, 1912. I have also located a much attenuated form of the tale, though clearly recognisable, in NLS MS. 14990 p. 67, collected in Ardnamurchan.

319 Eòs Nìll also says he remembers seeing it in a book, which was probably *Waifs & Strays of Celtic Tradition*.

320 Alwyn and Brinley Rees 1961, p. 231-2.

collapse at the door. His wife brings him inside, and he hands her an acorn which she plants, and from which a seedling appears on the same day that she delivers a son. As she was directed by her dying husband, she nurses the son until he is able to uproot the tree, a total of three seven year periods.

When his son is finally able to uproot his 'twin-tree', it is used as firewood to cook his farewell bannock.[321] He goes out into the world and finds employment with a *taigh-mòr* [big-house]. His first task is to thresh corn. Dissatisfied with the small ineffectual instruments which workers were given, he goes to the wood and makes his own flails from trees which are said to be like ship masts. Such is his awesome speed and energy that he frightens the people, who decide to find a way to destroy him before he causes their own end. They get him to dig a deep well, and try to refill it while he is at the bottom, but to no use. They ask him to plow a field which adjoins a lake inhabited by a voracious monster, but he pulls out a tree and strikes the monster with it. They ask him to grind meal at night at a mill which is also inhabited by a death-dealing beast, but he overcomes it and returns successfully.

His father is essentially a hunter-gatherer, living simply in the wild, uncultivated forest. The tree nature of the child is obviously first of all presaged by the father giving the mother the acorn, a symbolism of insemination in tree form. The notes to the story by James MacDougall give us the basics to the interpretation:

> The Big Lad, in his birth, girth, and trials, is just the oak-tree personified. His father falls with the oak he has felled, and he himself is born as the seedling from the acorn is breaking through the ground. He is nursed for seven years, and is then taken out by his mother to try if he can pull the young oak from its roots. This is also about the time when the oak-wood undergoes its first thinning. He is nursed another seven years... This is again about the time when the oak-wood undergoes its second thinning. At the end of a third period of seven years —the time when he arrives at maturity, and when the oak-tree undergoes the last thinning — he goes to the tree, pulls it out of its roots, and thus proves that of the two he is stronger.

I would go a step or two further than this, however. In most of the episodes, our character employs trees or timber items in the successful completion of his tasks: turning trees into huge flails; using a *crann* to plow the field; using the tree in the field to thrash the monster. I would guess that

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[321] Implicit in *Mac Ceatharnach na Coille*, explicitly stated in *Mac Duine Làidir na Coille*.

trees might have been originally part of the other two episodes, possibly a wooden shovel for digging the well, and some wooden implement for milling or fighting the *Ùruisg*.[322]

The hero is a sort of 'Super-Tree-Man', the supreme master of tree exploitation. Unlike his father, who lived at the whims of wild nature, the son harnesses trees and his own tree nature to further his endeavours.

Craobh nan Ubhal

One of the best known, yet most elusive, poems which makes extended use of the tree metaphor is the song *Craobh nan Ubhal*.[323] Songs such as this, evolved within the *òran-luaidh* [waulking song] tradition, carry a certain complexity with them, as the formulaic and 'modular' nature of the *òran-luaidh* tradition allows, even encourages, sections of text to float in and out of songs.

I have already discussed apple-tree and apple-fruit imagery above, noting particularly the connotations of fertility and sexuality that can sometimes be implied by these symbols. It is a testimony to the song's rich and primal symbolism that Thomson admits: 'I do not profess to understand this song adequately. I think the imagery may have sexual connotations, but it may be that the texts are now too fragmentary for a full understanding of them.'[324] In his article about tree imagery, John MacInnes states that although the praise of a social leader in tree terms is a common metaphor in Gaelic tradition:

> *...anns an òran Craobh nan Ubhal, tha an dàimh nas dlùithe, nas pearsanta. Se òran-molaidh a tha ann; ach tha dreach àraid air na briathran a bhuadhaicheas air duine gur h-e fior chuspair an òrain an gaisgeach agus an ceann-cinnidh an inbhe leannain.*[325]
>
> ...in the song Craobh nan Ùbhal, the relationship is closer and more personal. It is a eulogy; but there is a particular mode of expression in the words that imply to a person that the true subject of the song is the warrior and chieftain in the form of a lover.

The two earliest examples of this song are recorded by Alexander Carmichael in *Carmina Gadelica* vol. 5 (hereafter referred to as texts *'CGa'* and *'CGb'*). *CGa* is stated to have been transcribed in Barra in 1869. *CGb* has no

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322 Or alternatively, these two episodes may have been later embellishments to purely tree-oriented episodes.

323 The variants are given in full in Appendix A.

324 Derick Thomson 1989, p. 95.

325 Iain MacAonghuis 1983, p. 69.

source ascription. Although we must be careful of using Carmichael literally as a source, his versions correspond very well to the MacCormick text. The *CG* texts have stanzas of 47 lines and 40 lines.

The next example is from the MacCormick collection, made in 1893 in South Uist by Donald MacCormick[326] (hereafter referred to as text *'M'*). Although the song is entitled *Craobh an Iubhair* and this is also given as the refrain line, the main text is in fact the same as *Craobh nan Ubhal*. It has 46 lines. This is probably the most reliable and coherent text we have, although it does not contain all of the motifs and lines in the other versions.

An 18-line version was recorded in 1938 from Ruairi Iain Bhàin of Barra by John Lorne Campbell (hereafter referred to as text *'R'*). It contains the primary motifs of the song, but is noticeably shorter than the above texts.

A version recorded from Calum Johnston of Barra in 1954 (hereafter referred to as text *'C'*) is printed in *Tocher* vol. 2, and consists of 14 unique lines of stanza. While it is faithful to the sense of the previous texts, it seems very attenuated.

A short text appears in *Eilean Fraoich*, p. 61 (hereafter referred to as text *'E'*). Only the chorus and a descriptive line or two remain intact. Otherwise, most of the lines are different and the transmitters of the song seem to have lost track of the fact that the tree is simply a metaphor for a human subject rather than a real tree.

A fragment of four lines of the song was interpolated into a variation of *An Fhìdeag Airgead* in *Òrain Luaidh Màiri Nighean Alasdair*.[327] These four lines illuminate South Uist variants.

There are a number of motifs which appear in these songs which can be enumerated and examined to analyse how they operate within the song and within the context of the Gaelic poetic tradition in general to help us appreciate the symbolism, effect and artistry of the song.

Many of the motifs are the common conventions of praise that are to be found throughout the *òran-luaidh* tradition. The subject of praise is wealthy (variants in *M*, *CGa* and *CGb*); strong (*'an duine treubhach...l'a dhùirn a nì e 'phronnadh* [the gallant man... he pounds it with his fists]', variants in *CGa*, *CGb*, *M*, and *R*); is an excellent horseman (variants in *CGa*, *CGb* and *M*); wears

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326 This collection forms the basis of *HF* i. *Craobh an Iubhair* is song XXXV.
327 *OLMNA*, p. 35.

exquisite clothing (variants in *CGa, CGb, M* and *R*); is capable of performing 'impossible tasks' (text from *CGa*, variants in *CGb* and *R*):

Nì e sìoda de'n chlòimh Chèitin
Nì e sròl de'n fhraoch nam b' fheudar
Nì e fìon de uisg an t-slèibhe

He makes silk of May wool
He makes satin of heather if necessary
He makes wine from mountain water

An 'invocation of the graces' is recited for the protection of the tree, sometimes enumerating great mytho-historic figures of the Gaelic or Christian past (text from *R*, variants in *CGa, CGb, C* and *M*):

Chraobh nan ubhal, gun robh Dia leat
Gun robh gealach agus grian leat
Gun robh Mac Cumhaill 's an Cliar leat

O tree of the apples, may God be with you
May the moon and the sun be with you
May Mac Cumhaill and the sages be with you

The tree described by the texts is depicted in terms of fertility and virility, and the ambiguity of words pertaining to the parts of the tree can be neatly interpreted as referring to the strong-limbed, curly-haired warrior (text from *M*, variants in *CGa* and *CGb* and attenuated variants in *E* and *C*):

Chraobh mheanganach pheurach ùbhlach
Bun a' fàs 's a barr a' lùbadh
'S a meangannan air gach tùbh dhi
Ùbhlan troma, donna, dlùthmhor...

O tree abounding in branches, pears and apples
Trunk growing and its top bowing
And its branches on each side of it
Heavy, brown, dense apples...

The apples are particularly emphasised in all of the texts as being soft and sweet: '*Chraobh as mìlse 's as buig' ùbhlan* [O tree of the sweetest and the softest apples]'.

The singer of praise exclaims with proud passion that the tree is her own in all of the texts: '*Aithnich fhèin a' chraobh as lium-sa* [Recognise the tree that belongs to me]'.

CGb states that *Mac Aoidh na Ranna, ann an Ìle* [MacKay of the Rinns in Islay] was the subject of the song. While Mac Aoidh is also named in *CGa, M*

and *R*, there is no further evidence of the origin of the song, although texts *CGb* and *C* name a specific place where the tree is rooted and mention a second tree.

Reconstructing a 'proto-text' is impossible in a situation such as this, especially with so few sample texts in a tradition so fluid and dynamic as *òrain-luaidh*. Since his texts are often viewed with suspicion, it is interesting that the motifs in Carmichael's texts can all be found in the other variants in the song.

Craobh nan Ubhal is clearly an excellent example of the use of tree symbolism in the praise of a human subject, and the symbolism in the song was so implicit and primal that it began to confuse later tradition bearers who were not as well acquainted with earlier poetic conventions. The elaboration of praise of the human subject serve to ornament the song and parallel the tree symbolism with human descriptions of fertility (wealth) and strength.

There was also another song called *Craobh an Iubhair*, whose similiar title seems to have been confused with *Craobh nan Ubhal* somewhere in the transmission of the MacCormick text. Only fives lines of this song have survived in one text, presented in the collection made by Frances Tolmie:[328]

Chraobh an iubhair, hòg u ò,
Hi-ùraibh o, ho ro lèathagaibh

Togaidh, togaidh mi mo ghràdh
Fada, fada os cionn chàich
'S math an t-iomainich' air blàr
Caman òir an làimh mo ghràidh
'S am ball airgid air an làr.

O tree of the yew, hòg u ò,
Hi-ùraibh o, ho ro lèathagaibh

I will raise, I will raise my love
Far, far above the others
The player is good on the field
A shinty-stick of gold in my love's hand
And the ball of silver on the ground.

She adds a note, very relevant to this study, that 'The meaning of the refrain is no longer remembered by persons with ordinary knowledge of ancient lore.'

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[328] Frances Tolmie 1911, p. 231, song 71. Also given in Iain MacAonghuis 1983, p. 69.

Jesus as Tree

Tree imagery does appear in the Bible,[329] such in the prophecy of Isaiah 11:1 'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit'. This is closely paralleled (intentionally or accidentally) by an Old Irish address to Christ, which is elaborated with the typically Gaelic description of its noble hazel-tree origins:

a chráeb do chrunn Iasa / asin chollchaill choím...[330]
O branch of Jesse's tree / From the fair hazel-grove...

Mary is addressed in the same poem with the term *bile*.

In a mystical religious text written in Irish in the *Yellow Book of Lecan*,[331] Jesus is described as a wonderful tree rooted in the firmament, growing downwards into the earth. 'Whatever the inspiration behind 'The Mystical Tree', it clearly belongs to the tradition of the 'World Tree' which occurs in many religions and cultures.'[332]

Jesus is occasionally to be found described with tree terminology in vernacular Scottish Gaelic religious poetry, such as:

Am Barr dosrach donn dual...[333]
The flourishing brown begotten branch...

Agus Ògan geallaidh na glòrach a' tàmh...
Agus Ògan cùbhraidh na glòrach a' tàmh...[334]

And the promised branch of glory dwelling...
And the fragrant branch of glory dwelling...

The tree symbolism can be elaborated by reference to the fruitfulness and the prosperity He can bring:

Crann solais 's e làn de mheas
Rogh' gach toraidh a' teachd as
'N tràth 'sgaoileas meaghlan d'a dhos
Lìonaidh gàir na Cruinne leis...
A chraobh an àigh, cabhair dhuinn...[335]

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329 See Mary Low 1996, p. 83, 103-4.
330 Gerard Murphy 1956, poem 20, §4. 'Invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary', 11th century.
331 See English translation and discussion in Mary Low 1996, pp. 102-4.
332 *ibid*, p. 103.
333 *CG* III, p. 184, 'Soisgeul Chrìosd'.
334 *CG* I, p. 26.
335 *ibid*, p. 403.

A branch of light, full of fruit
The best of each harvest comes from him
When the branches of his foliage come out
He will fill the rejoicing of the world...
O tree of prosperity, help us...

The most striking example of the application of tree imagery to Christ is a poem called simply *Am Meangan* composed by Margaret Cameron (see Appendix B for biographical details and song in full) who exploits most of the elements of the 'Arboreal Panegyric Code' discussed above.

Besides the tree term of the title, other tree terms are used to address Christ in the body of the text: *faillean, crann* and *geug*.

The tree is tall, commanding and protecting for those seeking shelter, reaching into the heavens:

...Gheibh iad fo'n chraoibh so sgàil.
Crann ro thaitneach 'sgaoil ro fharsaing
Mach o chuan gu cuan;
'S ann fo 'sgàile gheabhar fasgadh
Taitneach do luchd-cuairt.
Tha 'àirde ruigheachd chum nan nèamh
'S thar nèamh nan nèamh a bhuaidh
Tha 'mhaise 's 'àilleachd a' toirt barr
Air gach crann 'dh'fhàsas suas...
Fo dhubh'r a gheugan gheabh na feumaich
Beatha, rèite 's blàths;
Fo 'sgàil a thròcair thig gach seòrsa...

...They will find shade beneath this tree.
Very pleasing branch which spread so wide
Outwards from sea to sea
It is under his shade that shelter is found
Pleasing shelter for travellers.
His height reaches to the heavens
And his virtue excels the heaven of heavens
His beauty excels
Every tree that grows upward...
Under the shadow of his branches the needy
Will get life, warmth and comfort;
Under the shade of his mercy all kinds come...

The tree is straight and erect: *'Is e gu dìreach 'fàs'*. The branch is full of fruit and foliage and fertility:

Meangan uasal, torach, buadhar...
'S iad gu lèir fo bhlàth...
Le ùr-mheas chum an làr
Toirt toraidh truim gach àm 's a' bhliadhna

A noble fertile potent branch...
And they are totally in blossom...
With fresh fruit down to the ground
Giving heavy fruit all year around

It is moist with dew: *'Is e gach uair fo dhriùchd* [It is continually drenched in dew].' It is *ùr*: *'Am Faillean gasta, ùr* [The excellence fresh sapling]'. It is good wood and not *crìon*: *'Gun fheachd' no fiaradh, ruaidh no crìonadh* [Without contortion, defect or withering]'. It has mature deep roots which the weather cannot overcome: *'Cha dèan stoirm a fhreumhan 'fhuasgladh* [No storm can untangle its roots].' It is rooted in a specific locale: *'E suidhichte air slèibhtibh Isreil* [He is situated on the slopes of Israel].' It can withstand harsh weather:

...Nach mothaich tart ri àm an teas
Nach searg 's nach seac gu bràth

...Who doesn't show thirst in the hot season
Who will never ever dry up or wither

It is actually somewhat surprising how the poet so comprehensively exploits the familiar conventions developed to praise the social leader-warrior in tree terms in praising Christ. This is further confirmation of the idea that Christianity can be absorbed within a native tradition without necessarily displacing or removing its institutions and world-view.

Metaphors from Experience or Mere Poetic Convention?

There are many regions of the Gàidhealtachd with scant tree cover, particularly the Outer Hebrides, and hence few of the immobile sector of the population of these regions could be expected to have first-hand knowledge of such a wide variety of tree types as are represented in Gaelic verse, if indeed they ever saw any trees at all. One is tempted to ask about the tree symbolism in Gaelic poetry: 'Are these metaphors arising from the direct experience of trees, or just 'pre-packaged' poetic cliches and conventions?'

The beginning of this Chapter has already explored the human-tree relationship that exists at a lexical level in the Gaelic language. Multiple semantic fields — puns — are often exploited by the poets, drawing on the parallels between humans and trees. Such multiple meanings are unlikely to be invoked if they are no longer active or understood, and the semantic fields

associated with trees in words such as *fleasgach* and *fiùran* may have significantly withered in places without woodland.

It seems significant that even though the majority of vernacular Gaelic verse researched in this study comes from the islands, nearly all of the examples using the noble - non-noble tree classification scheme come from the mainland of Scotland. It is immediately striking that Sinton's collection of poetry from Badenoch is responsible for most of the variety of tree types. Sìleas na Ceapaich, who makes the most extensive use of tree names, had experience of a wide variety from her environment in well-foliaged areas on the mainland.

Màiri Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, when she mentions any tree (or fruit) at all, only names the apple. She seems to be merely repeating a well known convention, and this may be due to a lack of familiary with a variety of trees. Likewise, comparing the known surviving works of John MacCodrum and Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair shows how little the island bard (MacCodrum) employed tree imagery and metaphor in contrast to the mainland bard.

Rob Donn was well familiar with trees, as his praise poem *Gleanna-Gallaidh nan craobh* demonstrates. Hew Morrison's edition of Rob Donn's poetry contains 456 pages of poetry, and in these are 19 eulogies comprising 66 pages. Yet there are only 4 short examples of traditional tree symbolism in his poetry. His desire for realism and his commitment to Christian ideals, explicitly stated in his poetry, no doubt limited his use of traditional panegyric motifs if they did not lend themselves to application according to these criteria.

Donnchadh Bàn nan Òran is an interesting anomaly. As he worked for a time as a gamekeeper in the wilds of Argyllshire and Perthshire for the Earl of Breadalbane[336] he was well acquainted with trees (as his *Òran an t-Samhraidh* displays) and as an adept Gaelic poet he knew traditional poetic rhetoric well. With all of his experience of trees, then, it seems unexpected that his eulogies very seldom draw upon the ubitiquous tree imagery of Gaelic poetry, although he uses it in praise of women, seldom fails to employ it in his satires and makes use of other kinds of tree imagery (to be discussed in later chapters). This is another example which illustrates how the vernacular

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[336] *ODB*, pp. xxiv-xxvi.

poets, although inheriting conventions largely defined by the literature of the learned poets which came down to them, were free to choose and elaborate those elements which suited their purposes and matched their experience and contexts.

As noted above, Francis Tolmie wrote that the reciters of *Craobh an Iubhair* (collected in the north of Skye) had forgotten the significance of the refrain. Although John L. Campbell says that most songs in the late 19th century MacCormick collection were still to be found in the Outer Isles in the 1930's, the song *Craobh nan Ubhal* (called *Craobh an Iubhair* in MacCormick) was one of the few which did 'not seem to be now widely known'.[337] Perhaps the circulation of this song was particularly attenuated due to a lack of experience of trees, and hence a lack of understanding of its sophisticated imagery and imagination. This hypothesis is supported by the very simplified version of the song recorded in Lewis which has completely lost sight of the sense of the tree metaphor, and instead takes the tree image literally.[338]

St. Kilda, whose rugged terrain and climate harboured no trees and allowed little intercourse with the outside world, made unusually little use of tree-based metaphor or kenning by Gaelic standards. Although the corpus of surviving St. Kilda Gaelic poetry must be minuscule in comparison to the actual output of the island's poets, and too small a sample size from which to make decisive conclusions, I have found only two uses of tree kennings, and these are words whose semantic range may well not have included trees in St. Kilda.[339] Besides this, there is only one poem in this collection which uses a tree metaphor:

> *Ged dh'fhalbh mo chraobh mhullaich fhèin...*
> *Ge nach b' chraobh a bha àrd thu*
> *Bu chraobh mhath a chum stàth thu...*[340]
>
> Although my topmost tree is gone...
> Although you were not a tall tree
> You were a good tree for use...

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337 *HF* i, p. 189.
338 *Eilean Fraoich*, p. 61.
339 Calum MacFhearguis 1995: *òganach* p. 60, poem a; *fleasgach*, p. 61, poem c.
340 *ibid*, pp. 61-2, poem e.

The first of the 'Tree-man' stories discussed above was collected from a native of Ardnamurchan in 1889, who learned it from a native of Suaineart (and subsequently heard it from a native of Lochaber).[341] The other story was collected in the 1980's from Eòs MacNìll in the well forested land of Nova Scotia.

My conclusion is that tree symbolism is to a large degree based on and maintained through direct experience with real trees, however 'literary' and 'learned' its origins may be. Although the resources for tree analogy and metaphor are present in the Gaelic lexicon as well as in the literary canon, only those poets who had a first-hand knowledge of trees tended to employ these devices to good effect. Although the tree element of the Gaelic Panegyric Code was very pervasive in the works of the earlier poets, it was only one of a number of options that poets had to choose from. Any one particular poet may have had reasons for not exploiting tree imagery adeptly, and thus he may have focused on other themes, or selected other types of metaphors.

Chapter Conclusions

The comparisons of trees and people is one that appears in many cultures, but the particular realisation and expression of the metaphor depends upon the associations and energies latent in the semantic fields of the language and the historical usages of the 'literary' (or oral-literary) traditions.

Tree kennings and symbolism can be seen to be equally exploited by both male and female poets. A smaller percentage of eulogies to female subjects survives of the earlier Scottish Gaelic corpus, so comparisons between male and female subjects is somewhat difficult. Tree symbolism was equally valid to a female subject, but the style and images varied appropriately. When applied to a male, tree imagery tends to centre upon protection, shelter, virility and warrior qualities. When applied to a female, tree imagery tends to draw upon connotations of beauty, youth and fertility.

It is not surprising that the majority of our corpus of Gaelic poetry has people as the subjects of the poems, as poetry had an important social function in the exposition of leadership in the traditional Gaelic world.[342]

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[341] Rev. J. MacDougall 1891, p. 291.

[342] The only example which I have found which uses the metaphor in the opposite direction, likening a tree to a person, appears to be a late-nineteenth century work influenced by the 'Ossianic style'. It can be

Tree symbolism provides a huge store of metaphors, images and epithets for the Gaelic poet, to an extent that would seem absolutely absurd and bizarre to an English-speaking audience. It is rare for an elegy to fail to employ tree symbolism of some sort. This would seem to be a tradition of great continuity from pre-Christian times, although the exploitation of these techniques is to a large extent dependent upon understanding and expressing traditional Gaelic conventions which have lost their vigour since the collapse of the Gaelic social order.

Tree symbolism has continued to be used into the twentieth century. The *bàird-bhaile*, who have continued to draw upon conventions in the store of centuries of poetry, are the most traditional exponents of the old 'Arboreal Panegyric Code'.

Dòmhnull Mac an t-Saoir describes Queen Elizabeth as:

> *Ealasaid — ar n-ùbhla bhòidheach...*
> *'S barr-dhos an stuic sin bho chian i...*[343]
>
> Elizabeth — our beautiful apple...
> She is the top-leaf of the ancient stock...

In the capable hands of the consciously Modernist poets, tree symbolism has become transformed by the crucible of European literature into a more abstract and 'literary' metaphorical language. The best example of this is Somhairle Mac Gill-eain, who has both thoroughly absorbed the traditions of Gaelic poetry and worked within the context of wider European literary and political movements. Familiar tree imagery can be found in his poetry, but often applied in new, fresh, evocative, unpredictable and almost inscrutable ways (his poem *Craobh nan Teud* is such as example).

However innovatory Mac Gill-eain's tree imagery may be, it should be remembered that its powerful evocativeness and multi-faceted complexity is built upon a foundation with centuries of precedent and countless exemplars deeply absorbed in the Gaelic psyche, and works so well precisely because the symbolism which he extends and embellishes is already so well developed in Gaelic tradition.

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found in *Guth na Bliadhna* 2, 1905, pp. 221-2.

[343] Donald Macintyre 1968, l. 7425, 7448 'Òran do'n Bhan-Rìgh Ealasaid'.

Chapter 2

Of Trees, Families and Groups

Chapter Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the parallels and connections in Gaelic literature and tradition between human individuals and trees. But just as trees can be found in wider eco-systems of groves and forests, so too can humans be found in larger social systems. Gaelic tradition extends its symbolism to deal with the kinship between groups of trees and groups of humans.

I pointed out in Chapter One that some of the human-tree parallelism exists at a lexical level, and this is true for terminology that deals with the 'family tree' in Gaelic. That is, the family is considered to be a kind of tree in which terms such as *meur* or *freumhach(d)* can refer to the branches and roots of a tree or to the branches or roots of a family. Other such terms will be considered below.

The Gaelic Panegyric Code has a highly elaborate and developed rhetoric for the praise, or satire, of human subjects and tree symbolism figures prominently among the conventions of this style. The elements of this symbolism can be found to be extended in the praise of families, warrior bands and the Gaels as a whole. I will enumerate the elements of the code, as delineated in the first Chapter, and illustrate how they have been employed in the praise, or satire, of groups of people.

Just as some individuals were named after trees or thought to have a special connection to real trees, so too were some tribes or families named after trees or thought to have strong associations with particular trees, especially trees which were thought to signal their downfall. Some of this evidence will be discussed below.

The connection between trees and particular clans in the Gàidhealtachd can also be seen in the tradition of clan plant-badges, *suaicheantas*. Although not all of these plant-badges were trees, an examination of the lore surrounding them suggests that tree symbolism played an active role in the choice and use of these badges.

Tree Terminology in Genealogy

I have already mentioned in the first chapter that one of the sources of the tree metaphor in Gaelic culture was genealogy. That is, the self-reproducing nature of the tree[1] — the 're-incarnations' of the parent tree in every new sprig — is akin to the coming of new generations who resemble common ancestors. In a patrilinear culture such as Gaeldom, such ancestral lines can be traced as trees and are implicit in a *sloinneadh* [patrilineal enumeration]. This is the very image that appears in poetry such as the following:

> *B' e siud am fìor dhuin' uasal*
> *'S gach faillean 'tha ris fuaighte...*
> *'S gur ioma' fiùran uasal*
> *A thàinig uat a-mach...*[2]
>
> He was truly a noble man
> With every branch connected to him...
> And many a noble sapling
> Came out from you...

In his study of Irish and Welsh kinship, T. M. Charles-Edwards observes:

> The standard metaphor for the kindred was that of the tree and its branches. It is a common metaphor in many societies, but the Irish liked to elaborate on it. There was the trunk, *bun*, with its branches, *gabla*. The trunk consisted of the common ancestors, whereas the branches were the collateral lines of descent, *gabla*, stemming from the *bun*. The ultimate point of origin was the *bunad*... The metaphor was far from being the preserve of lawyers: genealogists traced the 'branches of kinships' (*cráeba coibnesa*)...[3]

Indeed, such terminology and metaphors were elaborated and appear in many genres. The term *cráobh caibhniosa* appears, for example, in an address to Aonghus of Islay, circa 1250. Shortly before this 'technical term' appears in the poem, clans are likened to a freshly planted orchard and to the noble apple, thus 'priming' the listener:

> *Clanna Somhuirle, síol nGofraidh*
> *ór ghin tú, nár thaisigh bhú*
> *a lubhghort cuir, a chráobh abhla...*[4]

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[1] Such self-reproducing patterns in which the top-level scale is seen in the the lower levels are called 'fractals' by mathematicians. Fractal techniques are in fact used by computer graphics engineers to draw trees.

[2] Paul Cameron 1891, p. 348, 'Òran do fhear Phort-an-eilein', by Donncha MacDhiarmaid.

[3] T. M. Charles-Edwards 1993, p. 28.

[4] *IBP*, poem 45, §29.

(It is) the house of Somerled, the progeny of Godfrey,
from whom you are sprung, who did not hoard cattle,
O freshly planted orchard, O apple-branch...

The tree symbol can also appear in much less ornamented forms. In the tale *MacCuain* [son of the ocean], the king, while in exile, makes a maiden pregnant and she has a dream which signifies that her offspring are to become the next dynasty to rule the kingdom:

...Bhruadair i... gun robh craobh mhòr mhòr a bha 'dol thar an taighe is 'ga chòmhdachadh... 'Tha tighinn air mo shliochd-sa na chuireas an rìoghachd fopa fhèin.'[5]

...She dreamed... that there was an enormous tree that was going across the house and covering it... 'There will come of my progeny who will take control of the kingdom for themselves.'

Many of the terms delineating family relationships in modern Scottish Gaelic are based on tree terms. According to Dwelly, a genealogical tree is *craobh-sheanchais* or *craobh-ghinealaiche*. The term is used, for example, by Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair: *'Craobh-sheanchais teaghlaich rìgh...* [The genealogy of the king's ancestry]'.[6]

The term *freumhach(d)* also appears in the same sense as the colloquial term 'roots' in English: *'Sgrìobh ùghdair sìos do fhreumhachd...* [An authority wrote down your roots].'[7]

The Stewart dynasty is refered to as a tree:

Craobh Rìoghail nan Stiubhartach
Craobh as maisiche geugan...[8]

The royal tree of the Stewarts
Tree of the most comely branches...

The terms for branches of a tree are used to connotate family branches:

Gach meur a rinn sgaoileadh
O'n chraoibh a bha torrail...[9]

Every branch that grew out
From the tree that was virile...

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[5] *MWHT* vol. 1, p. 94. A similar vision of a massive tree, a *bile* in this case, which is interpreted as being a future ruler can also be found in the *Prose Dindsenchas*, §40.
[6] *HSFF*, p. 94, l. 61, 63, 'Òran a rinneadh 1746'.
[7] *HSFF*, p. 112, l. 84, 'Òran Mhorair Mhic-Shìomain, by Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair.
[8] *S*, p. 459, 'Còmhradh eadar Iain Brun Seanacha do Phriunnsa nan Gael, agus uaireadair pocaidh'.
[9] Iain MacGhrigair 1801, p. 31, 'Do Cheann-Cinnidh Cloinn Ghrigair'.

Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair judges George unworthy to be king on account of the remoteness and weakness of the branch on which he is placed:

Am meur boirionn o'n a bhuineadh thu
B' fhìor-iomallach 's a' chrann...[10]

The female branch to which you belong
[It is] truely remote on the tree...

Offspring may be refered to as the new leaves which appear on the branches, such as when Iain Lom wishes the Campbells to be without progeny: *'Sgrios gun duilleach gun iarmad*...[destruction without foliage (children), without anything remaining]'.[11]

The use of such terminology allows the employment of parallels and puns such as:

Biodh an sliochd ann gu buadhach
Fhad 's a bhios duilleach a' gluasad air crann...[12]

May the progeny be successful
As long as foliage moves on branches...

Family Tree Praise

The terminology and symbolism of the family as tree lends itself to exploiting the very well developed poetic conventions of praise of individuals in its 'arboreal' aspects, as I have already discussed in the first chapter. Almost all of the elements of the Gaelic Panegyric Code which can be found in relation to human subjects can also be found in the praise of the family.

The members of the family can be particularised and described with tree terminology:

Tha Stiùbhartaich ùrghlan
'Nam fiùrain gun ghiamh...[13]

The fresh-pure Stewarts are
Saplings without blemish...

Meanglan mullaich na craoibhe

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[10] *HSFF*, p. 100, l. 99-100, 'Òran a rinneadh 1746', by Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair.
[11] *OIL*, l. 2510, 'Murt Ghlinne Comhann'.
[12] *NBT*, p. 57, 'Do Thighearna Chola', by Iain MacGilleathain, Bàrd Thighearna Chola.
[13] *BG*, l. 4098-9, 'Òran nam Fineachan Gàidhealach', by Iain Dubh.

A-mach bho'n stoc a bha rìoghail 's gach gèig...[14]

Topmost-twig of the tree
Out from the trunk that was royal in every branch...

Gun tig na fiùrain Leòdach ort...
'Nan gaisridh ghaisgeil, lasgarra
Thig Lachannaich gun chàird...[15]

The MacLeod saplings will come for you...
A warlike brave battle-troop [they are]
The MacLachlans will come without delay...

The tree or forest (which is the family) is tall:

B' ùr a' choill as na dh'fhàs thu —
Sìol nam failleanan àrd bu mhòr stoirm...[16]

Fresh was the forest from which you grew -
The seed of the tall shoots of great storm...

The tree is straight:

'S ùr a' choill o'n d'fhàs thu
Gun fhàillinn, àlainn uasal
Gu h-ùrail dìreach dosrach...[17]

Fresh is the forest from which you grew
Without defect, beautiful and noble
Flourishing straight and densely foliaged...

The tree is fertile and full of fruit:

'S bha iad fo mheas glè mhòr
Aig geugaibh gineil a fhreumh'...[18]

And they bore great fruit
By the virile branches of his lineage...

Buaidh do d' shliochd, 's mo shliochd-s' an con-àgh
Mar choill' ùr a' brùchdadh toraidh![19]

Success to your people and to my people in equal measure
Like a flourishing forest bursting with fruit!

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[14] Donald Macintyre 1968, l. 7328-9, 'Marbhrann do'n Rìgh'.
[15] 'Òran nam Fineachan Gàidhealach', by Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, in Derick Thomson 1996, l. 1065, 1121-2; *HSFF*, p. 78, l. 89; p. 82, l. 145-6.
[16] *GC*, p. 74, 'Cumha do Niall Òg', by Mòr NicPhàidein, c. 1620.
[17] Iain Thornber 1983, p. 8, 'Mo Nighean Chruinn Chuimir Thu', by Donald MacKinnon.
[18] *BL* i, p. 109, 'An Sùgradh', Iain Mac Ailein Mhic Iain.
[19] Ewan MacLachlan, p. 243, l. 31-2, 'Elidh Chamaron'.

B' ùr a choill 's an d' rinn thu cinntinn
Chan fhaiceamaid innte crìonach
Measan grinn air bharr gach gèige...[20]

The wood in which you grew was flourishing
We could see no bad wood in it
But pleasing fruit on the tips of each branch...

The tree is not *crìon*:

coille 's i gun chrìonach —
gur lìonmhor a clann...[21]

It is a forest without a rotten tree
Its children are numerous...

Craobh ur sinnsribh cha chrìon a thàinig...[22]
The tree of your ancestors did not arrive withered (ie, but as a healthy tree)...

The tree has deep roots:

Eanach Clann Domhnuill an àigh
Mar fhreumhan abaich nach crìon...[23]

The renown of victorious Clan Donald
(is) like mature roots that don't wither...

These roots are often in specific locale or from a specific ancestor:

Nighean Dhòmhnuill o Chùil nan Sonn
'S e siud am fonn 'n do ghin bhur freumh...[24]

Donald's daughter from Cùil nan Sonn
That is the land that bore your roots...

An crann as dìrich r'a sheanchas
O'n a shìolaich e an Albainn...[25]

The straightest tree to narrate
Since it took root in Scotland...

Dalta dlùth do Chlann Iain
Mach a brollach Chlann Uisdein
O chraobh Àirigh Mhuilinn

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[20] *NBT*, p. 4, Archibald MacPhail, 'Do Chailein Mac Naoimhein'.
[21] *CD*, l. 591-2, 'A' Cheud Di-Luain de'n Ràithe'.
[22] *BL* i, p. 111, 'Òran do Shir Eachunn', by Iain Mac Ailein Mhic Iain. See also *T*, p. 111.
[23] *MC*, p. 7, 'Moladh Chlann Dòmhnuill'.
[24] *EB*, l. 1308-9, 'Òran d'a leannan', by Maighstir Seathan. The element *sonn* in the place-name reinforces the tree imagery.
[25] *BG*, l. 4498-9, 'Marbhrann Mhic Alasdair Triath na Luibe'.

Meur an duillich nach lùbadh...[26]

Close fosterling to Clann Iain
Out from the breast of Clann Uisdein
From the tree of Àirigh Mhuilinn
Branch of the foliage that wouldn't budge...

The tree withstands the elements, as when Sìleas na Ceapaich hopes that God will reinvigorate her clan *'Mar ghallan ùr nach lùb droch aimsir* [Like a fresh sapling that bad weather can't bend]...'.[27]

The 'wine-blood' of nobility is in the tree, as when Clan Donald was described: *'Gach meanglan a' sileadh fion...* [Every branch dripping wine...]'.[28]

The clan tree can be likened to the *bile,* as when the MacKinnons are compared to *'bile lasrach dian loisgeach* [an intensely burning *bile*]'.[29]

The wood of the tree is noble, sometimes corresponding with the plant badge of the clan, such as in the case of the Camerons in the first two examples. Connotations of virility, which are necessary for a family to produce enough heirs, can be seen in these examples:

A chraobh de'n darach 's ùr an gallan
Uasal, fallain, rìoghail...[30]

O tree of the oak of the most fresh sapling
Noble, healthy, royal...

Siud an dream a bha uasal...
Craobh dhearg de'n darach le rùsg
'S i gun lùb is gun ghaiseadh
An duilleag ghorm 's i cho cùbhraidh
Leis an driùchd 's i làn meala.[31]

That was the noble race...
Red tree of the oak with its bark
Without twist or blight
The green leaf which is so fragrant
With the dew and full of honey...

Is ùr a chraobh bho'n d' rinn sibh fàs
Na bheil fo thalamh is gu h-àrd
Chan eil searg am bun no 'm barr

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[26] *Tocher* 27, p. 144, 'Ach a Dhòmhnaill Mhic Sheumais'.
[27] *BSC*, l. 793, 'Marbhrann', 1720.
[28] *MC*, p. 7, 'Moladh Chlann Dòmhnuill'.
[29] Derick Thomson 1996, l. 1132, 'Òran nam Fineachan Gàidhealach', by Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair.
[30] *AD*, p. 43, 'Òran do'n chuideachd thogadh am Brudhach-Màiri goirear 'Volunteers Lochaber' 'sa bhliadhna 1795'.
[31] *An Gàidheal* 1876, 'Òran air posadh Loch Iall', later 19th century.

Ach an giuthas làidir òg...[32]

Flourishing is the tree from which you grew
All which is under ground and on high
There is no blight in the trunk or on its top
But rather a strong, young pine...

Ach a Rìgh mhòir, tog-sa 'n àird iad
Mar chraoibh iubhair mheurach mhiadhair...[33]

But o Great King, lift them up
Like a many-branched, revered yew tree...

Eachunn Ruadh (Hector Roy), who founded the Gairloch branch of the MacKenzies,[34] is praised by Uilleam Ros for being the sturdy trunk of his clan with the following tree symbolism:

'S Eachunn Ruadh air thùs dhiubh
O Là Raon Flodden nam beum trom'
A shocraich bonn na fiùbhaidh
Gu h-uallach dosrach suas gun dosgainn
Uasal o stoc mhùirneach.[35]

With Eachunn Ruadh leading them — (It is)
Since the Battle of Flodden of the heavy blows
That the trunk of the timber was established
Rising proudly, with thick leaves, without failure
Noble from a dear stock.

Such conventions can also be used for satire and dispraise. A saying about Clan MacArthur associating them with the ignoble alder may have originated from an insult: *'Mac Artair Srath-churra o bhun an stoc fheàrna* [MacArthur of Srath-churra from the base of the alder stock]'.[36] This may also be a reference to the alder being the wood which can be split at its root, thus displaying more 'vulnerability' from its base than other woods.[37]

There is no doubt that tree satire is being used in the flyting between Dòmhnall Gorm Slèiteach and Am Fear Carrach, with leaves symbolising the offspring of the 'family tree':

Fann an toradh air Sìol Charmaig

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[32] A song of the 'Balranald Elopement'. See, for example, Budge, p. 36.
[33] *BSC*, l. 791-2, 'Marbhrann', 1720.
[34] John Dixon 1886, pp. 29-36.
[35] William Ross 1937, p. 72, 'Moladh a' bhàird air a thìr féin'. Thanks to Ronald Black for this reference.
[36] *NGP*, p. 344. See also John G. Campbell 1887, p. 83.
[37] *NGP*, p. 212.

seann chrann crìon gun duilleach air...[38]

The produce of the race of Cormac is infirm
An old withered tree without leaves on it...

It is not uncommon for tree symbolism to be used in the lament of the toppling of a dynasty, the ruination of a family or the sorrow of a family due to the death of its leader, its 'trunk'. Variations of the line *'Is sinn mar choill' air a rùsgadh* [we are like a forest which has been stripped bare]' are particularly common:[39]

Mo chreach lèir Clann Mhic Dhùghaill
'S iad mar choill' air a rùsgadh...[40]

My total grief (for) the MacDougalls
They are like a forest stripped bare...

However, the metaphor is often elaborated and described in detail in order to emphasise grief and loss, as when Iain Mac Ailein Mhic Iain says that the MacLeans have become like a barren forest without their leader:

Mar choill ged tha sinn 's a barr air crìonadh
Gun mheas, gun bhlàth oirnn, ach tàir is dìobradh
Thoir caochladh bheus duinn fo sheul do shìochainnt
'S na sgath dhìot fèin sinn mar gheugan crìona.[41]

We are like a forest with withered branches
We have no fruit or blossom, but only disgrace and isolation
Give us a multitude of virtues with the seal of your peace
Do not lop us off from you like withered branches...

Another lament for the downfall of the MacLeans also hopes that the noble apple-tree will regenerate itself from its ruined remains rather than degenerate into an ignoble briar:

Tha bhur n-abhall air crìonadh
Eadar àrd 's ìosal
Gach aon latha dol sìos mar an smeòir...
'S iomadh craobh chaidh a gearradh
Ceart cho ìosal 's an talamh
As an sìolaicheadh faillean 's meòir.[42]

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[38] Angus Matheson 1951, p. 371.
[39] See for example *SJM*, l. 2767; *OLMNA*, p. 102; *CG* V, p. 32; *E*, p. 165; *BG*, l. 3700; *HF* i, l. 49; *NBT*, p. 22, etc.
[40] *T*, p. 266, 'Cumha do Shìom Òg, Mac Mhic Dhùghaill Mhór-thir', by Iain Mac Ghille-bhràth, 1812.
[41] *BL* i, p. 111, 'Òran do Shir Eachunn'; *T*, p. 111.
[42] *EB*, l. 1067-9, 1148-50, 'Ge grianach an latha', Maighstir Seathan, c. 1702.

Your apple tree has withered
Both high and low
Every single day going downwards like the briar...
There is many a tree which has been axed
Just as low to the ground
From which shoot and twigs would grow...

The twentieth century Uist bard Dòmhnall Mac an t-Saoir laments the withered state of Scotland without Clan Donald:

Tha Alba bhochd gun dòigh oirre
Gun cheannabhaidh a bheir dòchas dhi
Bho'n shearg air Craobh nan Dòmhnallach...[43]

Wretched Scotland is without recourse
Without leader to give her hope
Since the Tree of MacDonalds has decayed...

Sometimes the family tree is described in order to give the background about a person. It must be remembered that in Gaelic society, the belief in inherited characteristics and the sense of familial ties and obligations were overwhelmingly strong, and hence the praise or dispraise of a person reflected directly upon his or her family, and vice-versa. Thus, as has been seen in several examples above, the praise of the family tree often opens with a variation of the the line: *'B' ùr a' choill' anns an d' rinn thu cinntinn...* [Flourishing was the forest in which you grew].'[44] This metaphor is employed to praise the family of the well known Iain Ghlinne Cuaich:

Cha b' ann o'n doire nach b' fhiù 's an do chinnich am fiùran àrd
Ach a choille thiugh dlùth bhith air a lùbadh le meas gu làr...[45]

It wasn't in the worthless woods that the tall sapling grew
But the thick dense forest which is bent to the ground with fruit...

Donnchadh Bàn extends this convention and employs several other familiar tree metaphors in praise of his newly-wed wife and her family:

Chaidh mi do'n choill' an robh croinn is gallain
Bu bhoillsgeil sealladh mun cuairt;
'S bha miann mo shùl do dh'fhiùran barraicht'
An dlùths nam meangana suas;
Geug fo bhlàth o barr gu talamh
A lùb mi farasta nuas;

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[43] Donald Macintyre 1968, l. 4467-9, 'Nuair Chaidh a' Chlach a thilleadh'.
[44] Variations in *BL* i, p. 213; *GC*, p. 74; 'Fàilte Dhruim Fionn' by the Johnstons of Barra; song of the 'Balranald Elopement'; Iain Thornber 1983, p. 8; *NBT*, p. 22; Sinton 1906, p. 81; etc.
[45] Alexander Stewart 1887, p. 305.

Bu duilich do chàch gu bràth a gearradh
'S e 'n dàn domh 'm faillean a bhuain.[46]

I went to the wood in which were trees and saplings
It was bright to look around
My eye's delight was the outstanding branch
In the thickness of the shoots overhead;
A bough in bloom from its top to the ground
That I gently bent downwards
It would be hard for others to ever cut it
As I was destined to reap the branch.

There are at least five songs which are variants of the *Smeòrach* [mavis] theme, apparently an innovation of the Uist bard John MacCodrum, popularised by Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, and subsequently followed by Dòmhnull MacLeòid, Eoghan MacLachlainn and Ailean Dall.[47] In this song, the poet declares himself the mavis of his clan who sings their praise. Although the imagery of such songs is suggestive, none of them explicitly states that the tree upon which they alight is the clan tree. Although the metaphors might be slightly mixed between people as birds and as branches/trees, the same imagery can be seen in these examples describing the tree upon which the poet-mavis sits as is used to praise the family-tree:

Maduinn Chèitinn 'n àm dhomh dùsgadh
Sheinninn gu h-èibhinn, eutrom, sunndach
Dealt nan speur air gheugan cùbhhraidh...[48]

On a May morning, in my waking hour
I would sing merrily, lightly, gleefully
The dew of the skyes on fragrant branches...

Cha b'i crìonach liath no mosgan
Bho'n a shìolaich treud an fhortain
Ach fiodh miath, gun mhiar, gun socadh...[49]

It was no grey withered or decayed stick
From which the fortunate family took root
But sappy wood, without knots or spurs...

This imagery finds a parallel in the lament composed for the Earl of Argyll by *an t-Aos Dàna MacShithich* in which the loss and instability for his

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[46] *ODB*, l. 1668-75, 'Òran d' a chéile nuadh-phosda'.
[47] Another example, by Donald MacPherson, exists NLS MS 14892 f. 60r.
[48] *The Celtic Monthly* XXI, p. 239, 'Smeòrach Chloinn Dùghaill', by Ailean Dall.
[49] Domhnull MacLeòid 1811, p. 123, 'Smeòrach'.

followers caused by his death is said to be like a storm which deprives the birds of their shelter:

Is fuathasach a' ghaoth so thàinig
Ghluais i an fhiùbhaidh
Dh'fhuadaich i na h-eòin le stoirm ghàbhaidh
O'n choill chaomhaidh.[50]

This wind which has come is terrible
It has shifted the wood
It has cast away the birds with a dangerous storm
From the sheltering forest.

The poem *A' Choille Ghruamach* [The Gloomy Forest] is well known for its depiction of the difficult challenges for the Gaels who found themselves removed to a harsh, alien, heavily-forested landscape in Canada which they had to clear, with painstaking labour, in order to survive (more on this topic in Chapter Four). The poem begins:

Gum bheil mi 'am ònrachd 's a' choille ghruamaich
Mo smuaintean luaineach, cha tog mi fonn:
Fhuair mi an t-àit' seo an aghaidh nàduir
Gun thrèig gach tàlanta bha 'nam cheann.[51]

I am here all alone in the gloomy forest
My thoughts are restless, I can't be merry
I got this place unnaturally
Every talent that was in my head has left me.

Most commentators on this poem have only looked at these images literally, but if seen in the light of the family-tree symbolism, another layer of meaning in the poem emerges. *Bàrd Thighearna Chola*, who made the poem, was very familiar with the earlier Mull bard Anndra Mac an Easbuig, whose poems he had in manuscript. One such poem by the earlier poet closely parallels the Canadian imagery:

'S mi craobh choimheach na coire
A bha roimhe seo 'n coille
'S cha bu doimheamh an doire as 'n do bhuaineadh...[52]

I am the misplaced tree of the corrie

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[50] *BG*, l. 4712-5.

[51] *BG*, l. 369-372, by Iain Mac Gille-eathain, Bàrd Thighearna Chola.

[52] *EB*, l. 879-81, 'Iorram', c. 1705. The word *doimheamh* is an usual one, but, as noted in *EB*, p. 224, can be found in Maceachen's Dictionary as 'vexed, grieved, sad' and in Rev. Duncan Campbell 1978, no. 114, as *doitheamh* 'cross'. It is given in Dinneen's *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* as *doithimh* 'uneasy, troubled...'.

Who was previously in a forest
And the grove from which it was taken was not troubled...

The same metaphor appears in another very well-kent Mull poem, *Gaoir nam Ban Muileach*, which laments that without the leadership of their chieftain, his followers will be without shelter: *'Is iad gun fhios cò an doire 's an tàmh iad* [and they don't know what grove they will dwell in]...'.[53]

Thus, the bard in Canada is not only lamenting the overwhelming presence of the forest — which seldom appears in Gaelic tradition as dark and menacing[54] — but is also expressing his regret that his old familiar social environment is gone and that he has been thrust into a world without the same comforting ties of kith and kin.

A remarkable example of the re-rooting of these poetic conventions is illustrated by a eulogy to the MacNeills of Glace Bay, Cape Breton, praising the ancient venerable family-tree which has weathered the transplant and found fresh soil in which to spring anew:

Cha b' ann 's a' choill 's an robh 'chrìonaich
Rinn a' chraobh so 'n toiseach freumhachd
Bha i ann bho linn nam Fianntan
'S cha tèid crìoch oirre a chaoidh.

Meur de'n chraoibh o'n fhlùr as àillidh
Air 'bheil cùnntas bho linn Adhaimh
Bha 'riamh gun ghaiseadh gun fhàillinn
Fàs 's gach garradh anns gach tìr.

'S ann bho'n chraoibh so a dh'fhàs gun mhearachd
Bho'n a chinn an linn tha fearail
Fìor Chlann Nèill bho thìre Bharraigh...[55]

It was not in the forest of withered wood
In which this tree initially rooted itself
It has been around since the Fenian Age
And it will never come to an end.

A branch of the tree from the most beautiful flower
Which we have known since Adam's time
It has always been without flaw or defect
Growing in the gardens of each land.

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[53] *BG*, l. 3737, 'Gaoir nam Ban Muileach', by Mairearad Nighean Lachlainn, c. 1716.

[54] More on this topic in Chapter Four.

[55] Donald Fergusson 1977, pp. 117-8, 'Deoch Slàinte Ghàidheil Ghasda', the original from the Canadian newspaper *Fear na Céilidh*. The last line in the book, given as the original, is '*...thìr a' Bharraidh*', which I have altered to make sense.

It is from this tree that has grown, without aberration —
From lineage that is manly has grown —
The pure Mac Neills from the land of Barra...

This metaphorical language, like that of the individual as tree, has continued to be used, developed and extended by Gaelic bards of the twentieth century. Somhairle Mac Gill-eain's most famous poem, *Hallaig*, particularly stands out, in which he employs these symbolic conventions to evoke the spirits of ancestors inhabiting a landscape saturated with legend and history but practically devoid of living human inhabitants in recent times:

...'s tha mo ghaol aig Allt Hallaig
'na craoibh bheithe, 's bha i riamh...
Tha i 'na beithe, 'na calltuinn
'na caorann dhìreach sheang ùr...
Tha 'n nigheanan 's am mic 'nan coille...
Tha iad fhathast ann a Hallaig
Clann Ghill-eain 's Clann MhicLeòid...[56]

...and my love is at Allt Hallaig
She is a birch tree and she has always been...
She is a birch, she is a hazel
She is a straight fresh slender rowan...
Their daughters and their sons are a forest...
They are still in Hallaig
The MacLeans and the MacLeods...

Unlike the praise poetry of earlier eras, when modern poems such as *Hallaig* use the conventions of the panegyric code, the implications are often startling or ironic. Whereas the earlier poetic tradition uses the tree as a metaphor primarily to praise the noble social leader and his flourishing followers, *Hallaig* states grimly that only the trees remain as a reminder of the people whose spirits return to haunt it. While the implications of the pathetic fallacy are that just rule brings prosperity to people and nature in symbioses, the unjust rule of the post-Culloden Gàidhealtachd has cleared away the people and left the land to government reforestation.

Warrior groups as forests

Groups of warriors, armed with their arsenal of weapons — many of them long and wooden — are often metaphorically referred to as trees and forests in Gaelic literature. This use of imagery of groups of people and their

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[56] Somhairle MacGill-eain 1991, pp. 226-8.

weapons is explicit in early Irish tales such as *Mesca Ulad* and *Cath Ruis na Rìg*,[57] and it is this Celtic source that provides Shakespeare with his 'Birnam Wood' motif in the play *Macbeth*.[58]

This symbolism shows up no less explicitly and characteristically in Scottish Gaelic literature and tradition, particularly in poetic panegyric, as in this description of a war-band:

Bha clann mhic Dhùghaill ann
Mar choille dhlùth nan àrd chrann
Na gallain ùra gun mheang gun èislean...[59]

The MacDougalls were there
Like a dense forest of tall trees
The fresh saplings without flaw or weakness...

Likewise, the warriors falling in battle in Egypt are likened to trees felled:

Chuir buillean lann le susbaireachd
Bho'n tuinn mar choilltich thuislidh iad
Gach dara crann a' tuiteam dhiubh
'Nan sìneadh sìos le cuspaireachd...[60]

Sword blows dealt with force pushed
Them like a falling forest from the wave
Every second tree of them falling
Laid low with marksmanship...

Iain Lom described the warriors in the following of Alasdair Mac Colla as though they were shoots appearing from the thickets of the Highlands:

Gun èireadh siud leis-san
Fir ùr' agus fleasgaich
O na badain bheag phreas am bi 'n ceò...[61]

The following would rise with him —
Young men and saplings
From the clumps of thickets in the mist...

A prophecy attributed to the Coinneach Odhar gives a parallel between the growth of a forest and the appearance of a regiment of soldiers that strongly suggests the influence of the warband-forest motif: *'Nuair a dh'fhàsas coille air a' Bhlàr Dhubh gu àirde duine, chìthear rèiseamaidean shaighdearan ann*

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57 See Patrick Sims-Williams 1977-8, p. 113; Haycock, pp. 304, 316-7 (notes 56 and 60) for discussion.
58 Marged Haycock 1990, p. 304.
59 Iain MacIllean 1818, p. 137, 'Cumha do Shìm Òg Mhórthir', by Alasdair MacFhionghuin.
60 *ibid*, p. 148, 'Òran le Alasdair MacFhionghuin an uair chaidh e air tìr san Eiphit'.
61 *OIL*, l. 396-8, 'Cumha Alasdair Mhic Cholla'.

an òrdugh catha [When a forest grows on Blàr Dubh to the height of a man, a regiment of soldiers will be seen in battle formation].'[62]

There is even evidence of the tradition of the literal planting of a forest as a commemoration of battle: 'It is the residence of the Campbells of Southhall, and the woods surrounding it are said to have been planted to represent the opposing armies at the battle of Waterloo.'[63]

We can sense reverberations of these symbols in the poetry of Somhairle MacGill-eain, especially in his celebrated *Coilltean Ratharsair*. Once again the conventions of the tradition have been realigned, this time by employing the warrior imagery to describe the trees:

Gallan a' ghiuthais
air lùthadh an fhirich
gorm chlogadan suaithneis...
Thug thu dhomh clogadan
clogadan uaine
clogad a' bhioraidh...[64]

Shoots of the pine
On the slope of the hill
Green heraldic helmets...
You gave me helmets
Green helmets
The helmet of the poignant...

The Forest of Gaels

This metaphor was extended to describe communities and to cover Gaeldom as a whole. An Irish poet pleads with Seumas Mac Aonghuis, the head of the branch of Clan Donald in Islay and Kintyre, to help his fellow Gaels in Ireland to overcome English tyranny. In the poem, Fionn Mac Cumhaill and Oisín discuss who would be best suited to provide aid to the distressed Irish. Fionn answers with tree symbolism that even invokes the sacred and sheltering *bile*:

'Gég díbh féin,' ar Fionnmhac Cumhaill
'creidfid dó, ní damhna bróin:
as fáoi chláonfas Fine Féilim
bile sháorfas Éirinn óigh'...[65]

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62 Dòmhnall MacÌomhair 1990, p. 46.
63 *The Kyles of Bute and Glendaruel*, p. 3.
64 Somhairle MacGill-eain 1991, pp. 170, 174.
65 *IBP*, 'Address to Sémas Mac Aonghuis', poem 43, §18.

'a branch from themselves', said Fionn Mac Cumhaill,
'in him they shall trust, no reason for sorrow,
Under him shall Féilim's house bow down,
a *bile* that will deliver virgin Ireland'...

In a Classical Gaelic poem of Scottish origin, the roots of the Gaels of Scotland and Ireland are equated, but contrasted with ignoble foreigners:

Gaoidhil Éireann ocus Alban
aimsir oile
ionann a bfrémha is a bfine...
Fuair Gaoidhil geall gach gaisgidh
ar ghort gábhuidh;
ní hionann sliochtchroinn a síodhuibh
is cniochtghoill cháluidh.[66]

The Gael of Ireland and Scotland,
long ago,
their roots and kinship were identical...
The Gaels have excelled in all warlike deeds
on the field of peril,
the race of trees from fairy mounds is
not equal to tame foreign knights...

The Gaels are depicted as a forest in vernacular Scottish Gaelic poetry in verses such as:

'Chraobh as àirde 's an doir' thu
No an coille nan Gàidheal...[67]

You are the tallest tree in the grove
(And) in the forest of the Gaels...

Such images invoke the conventions and symbolism of praise discussed in the first chapter, as well as conveying the impression that the forest, and hence the Gaelic community, is populous, dense, impenetrable, and has other such qualities.

In reversal of the curse of the *Glaisteag Lianachain* against the Kennedys of Lochaber,[68] Ewan MacLachlan hopes his people will be plentiful and long-lived, invoking the Cameron oak plant-badge — the Camerons were a dominant clan in this region — in his tree symbolism:

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[66] William J. Watson 1927a, p. 84-5, §14, 16. I have taken Ronald Black's advice in interpreting the word *cáluidh* as meaning 'tame; domestic'.
[67] *BL* i, p. 206, 'Òran do Shir Eachann', Mairearad Nigheann Lachainn, 1751.
[68] See for example *The Celtic Monthly* IX, p. 189; *The Celtic Annual* 1911, p. 33; *Leabhraichean Sgoile Gàidhlig* III, p. 57.

Lìonmhor mar raithnich
An stoc air gach baile
Sliochd buan mar an darach
Is maireann 'na rùsg;...[69]

Plentiful like the bracken,
Their stock in every steading
A race enduring as the oak,
It holds fast in its bark...

There is a little irony in Donnchadh Bàn's praise of the powerful Earl of Breadalbane, whose family had been very innovative in reforestation (particularly in their introduction of foreign trees) in the 17th and 18th centuries, and in their reorganisation of tenant-laird relations. In a verse which could refer to either the trees or the tenants, he says:

O bheul Tatha gu Latharn Ìochdrach —
Sin fo chìs duit agus corr,
Far an d' fhàs na gallain fhìorghlan —
Is iad lìonmhor ann gu leòr.[70]

From the mouth of the Tay to Nether Lorn
That and more was under tribute to you
Where the stainless saplings grew
And they were very numerous.

The disasterous consequences of the post-Culloden era are described by Iain Ruadh Stiubhart in vegetal imagery which is both literal and metaphorical:

Mo chreach an dùthaich air an tàinig:
Rinn sibh nis clàr rèidh dhith cho lom
Gun choirce, gun ghnàiseach...
Ach sgrios na craoibhe f'a blàth oirbh
Air a crìonadh bho 'barr gu 'bonn.[71]

My sorrow for the country upon which this has come:
You have now made a barren level plain of her
Lacking oats or corn...
The ruin of the blossoming tree on you lot!
Withered from top to bottom.

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[69] Ewan MacLachlan 1980, p. 235, l. 125-9, 'Duan do dh'Oidhche na Bliadhna Ùire'.
[70] *ODB*, l. 4803-6, 'Cumha Iarla Bhraghaid-Albann'.
[71] *BG*, 'Latha Chuil-Lodair agus Cor nan Gàidheal', l. 2411-3, 2417-8. Note that the word *gnàiseach* may also refer to a grange.

Somhairle Mac Gill-eain uses very similar traditional tree imagery in his comment on the aftermath of Culloden to evoke the same sense of loss and desolation that lingers in the barren landscape of the Highlands:

Geugan maireann is crìona
a liùbhair am blàthan
do mhachraichean eile
agus Alba 'na fàsach
geugan seacte gun ubhlan
ach flùraichean gràtha
is raointean na h-Albann
fuaraidh craingidh, cùis nàire...
Ach 's e bh'ann ach am bristeadh
do chinneadh nan Gàidheal
is cha do dh'fhàs air an raon seo
ach craobh sheargte an ànraidh.[72]

Withered branches that still stand
Which have surrendered their blossoms
To other fields
While Scotland is a desert
Branches dried up, without fruit
Only hideous flowers
With the fields of Scotland
Chill and parched, an object of shame...
But what it was was a breaking
Of the Gaelic people
And nothing grew on this field
But the shrivelled tree of misfortune.

A similar metaphor is used by Ailean Dùghallach to describe how the introduction of the *cìobairean Gallda* [Lowland shephards] had negative knock-on effects on the rest of Highland society:

Mar gun tuiteadh iad fo'n chraoibh
Cnothan caoch dol aog 's a' bharrach;
'S ann mar siud a tha seann daoine
'S clann bheag a h-aogais bainne...[73]

As if they had fallen from the tree
Ruined nuts dying in the thicket —
That is how the old people and
Young children are, without their usual milk...

When the Reverend Norman MacLeod scolded the upper ranks of society for estranging themselves from the lower ranks, in his fictional narrative, it is tree imagery that he employed: *'Ged a b' ubhlan iadsan air a' ghèig a b'*

[72] Somhairle MacGill-eain 1991, pp. 220, 222, 'Cuil-Lodair 16.4.1946'.
[73] Donald Meek 1995, 'Òran do na Cìobairibh Gallda', l. 33-6.

àirde bu mheanglain sinn uile de'n aon chraoibh [Although they were the apples on the topmost branch, we were all shoots from the self-same tree].'[74]

In the introduction to the 4th edition of Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's book of poetry, Iain Mac Coinnich addressed himself to the students of the *Comunn Oiseanach* at Glasgow University in tree terminology:

> *...agus mo dhùrachd nach caochail sibh nòs, gus an èirich ur cinn le buaidh an àirde thar gach Galla chomunn mar an "liath-dharag dhosrach, thar uile-chrannaibh na giuthasaich," agus gum beachdaich gach sùil oirbh le h-ioghnadh, a' fàs le mùirn fo bhlàth, mar gheugan iubhair, agus mar ghàradh fiona.*[75]
>
> ...and it is my hope that you will not change your ways, that your heads will ascend above the non-Gaelic societies like 'the well-leafed grey oak above all the trees of the pine-forest,' and that every eye will look upon you with amazement, blooming with joy, like branches of the yew, and like a grape-vine.

The following poet makes a sombre statement about 19th century prejudices against the Gaels in the cities, that their coarse outer 'bark' covered 'valuable material' sometimes unrecognised by others:

> *Is ged a shealladh na Goill sìos oirnn*
> *Nuair bhitheamaid dìreach o thìr nam beann;*
> *Fo'n chairt as suarraiche 's tric a fhuaireas*
> *Am fiodh as luachmhoire am measg nan crann.*[76]
>
> Though the Lowlanders may look down on us
> When we would be fresh from the Highlands
> It is often under the most hideous bark
> That the wood most valuable amongst trees is found.

In her function as the visionary poet of the Land League, Màiri Mhòr wishes her people to reclaim and re-occupy their homeland, just as seedlings on those empty homesteads can grow again:

> *'S ged a chrìonadh leis a' bhàs*
> *Na craobhan dh'fhàs cho fiachail*
> *Dh'fhàg iad meanglain air an làraich*
> *A nì 'n àite lìonadh...*[77]
>
> Although they withered with Death,
> Those trees that grew so valuable,

---

[74] An t-Urramach Tormod MacLeòid 1910, p. 405.

[75] From the introduction of the 1834 edition of *Ais-éirigh na Seann Chànain Albannaich*. Thanks to Ronald Black for this reference.

[76] W. Mackenzie 1878, p. 21, by John Campbell.

[77] Màiri Nic-a-Phearsoin 1891, p. 73, 'Faighe na Cloimhe'.

They left shoots in their places
That will fill their space...

Soirbheachadh le clann mo ghaoil
Meadhan latha, òige 's aois
Is fàsadh meanglan air gach craoibh
A lìonas raon an aithrichean...[78]

May my beloved people prosper
In youth, adulthood and old age
And may shoots grow on every tree
That will fill the field of their fathers...

In her praise for the Gaels of Oban, Màiri Mhòr describes the beautiful trees that flourish there. These are, of course, actually the Gaels themselves, who are contrasted to the ignoble foreign trees:

Tha an t-Oban làn chraobhan ro fhiachail
A' fàs gus an iarmailt gun mheang
Chan fhacas riamh coille gun chrìonaich
'S dh'fhàs droighionn a freumhaibh nan Gall.[79]

Oban is full of worthy trees
Growing to the heavens, without fault,
A forest without bad timber was never seen —
A bramble has grown from the roots of the non-Gaels.

The very idea of a Gaelic people implies, at least to major sectors of the Gaelic-speaking population, that the language is a vital and necessary element of Gaelic identity. Thus it is not surprising to see the language also worked into the tree symbolism and overall 'ecological' metaphor.

Now that the 'Tree of Gaeldom' has splintered itself all over the world, can it sustain itself when the stock of that tree is decaying in its own homeland?

Ged 's pailt na daoin' agaibh feadh an t- saoghail
Tha bun na craoibhe o'n d'rinn sibh fàs
An tìr a' gharbhlaich an iomall Albann
A thug an t-ainm dhuibh a th'oirbh aig càch
'S an latha chrìonas i anns na freumhaichean
Cia mar bhiadhas am bun am barr?[80]

Although your people are populous all over the world
The trunk of the tree that you grew from
In the rough lands in Scotland's hinterland

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78 *ibid*, p. 288, 'Marbhrann do Dhr. Neacal Martainn'.
79 *ibid*, p. 281, 'Tobar Dhruim-a'-Mhargaidh'.
80 Dòmhnall Macintyre 1968, l. 4081-6, 'Òran air Cor na Gàidhlig'.

That gave you the name by which others know you
The day that (Gaelic) withers in the roots
How will the trunk be able to feed the branches?

Probably the best known example of this use of the metaphor for Gaelic and its people at the present time is in Murdo MacFarlane's rallying song, *Cànan nan Gàidheal* [The Language of the Gaels], well known as a pop-music song on account of its popularisation by *Na h-Òganaich* and by Kathy Ann MacPhee. The song begins with a variant of a Gaelic proverb about the sorts of weather that originate from different directions, but adds that this is not the cause for the decay of the 'tree':

Cha b'e sneachd is a' reòthadh bho Thuath
Cha b'e 'n crannadh geur, fuar bho'n Ear
Cha b'e 'n t-uisge is an gailleann bho'n Iar
Ach an galair a bhlian bho'n Deas,
Blàth, duilleach, stoc agus freumh
Cànan mo thrèibh 's mo shluaigh...
Nuair a spìon iad a fhreumh as an fhonn
'N àite Gàidhlig tha Cànan nan Gall...

It was not the snow and frost from the North
Or the bitter cold withering from the East
Or the rain and storm from the West
But the disease from the South that blasted
The bloom, foliage, trunk and root
Of the language of my people...
When they tore the root from the soil
In the place of Gaelic is the stranger's tongue...

Tree Names and Kin Names

I have already noted in Chapter One that, at least in the earliest sources, personal names meaning tree (such as *fid*), a kind of tree (such as *Iubar*), or 'the son of ' a kind of tree (such as *MacCuilinn*) were not unknown, although their use became less common in later times. This pattern seems replicated in the use of trees in kin names.

One ethnic grouping amongst the Continental Celts was the *Eburones*, the 'people of the Yew'. The *Eoghantacht* of early Ireland had a close association with the yew in legend, which is the root of their name.[81] In early Ireland group names such as *Fir Bile* ('the men of the *bile*') and *Fir na Craeibe* ('the men of the tree') also appear.[82] The kin name *Ui Fhidgente*, the 'wood-

[81] Francis John Byrne 1973, p. 182; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh 1980, p. 217.
[82] A. T. Lucas 1963, pp. 18, 20.

engendered people' appears in Ireland, named after an ancestor with the title *Fidgente*.[83]

There are several traditions about kin-names having tree origins in Scottish Gaeldom, and although these may only be later folk-etymologies, rather than true explanations of their actual origins, such traditions demonstrate that the concept of tree origins was productive and acceptable.

The name Darach, Daroch, or Darroch first appears as a name in Stirlingshire in 1406,[84] although it is most likely to be a surname derived from the place-name near Falkirk. The name also appears in Islay and Jura, where the people were considered a sept of Clan Donald. It is not clear if the name in these Gaelic regions was imported from the Lowlands, whether it was originally a title or epithet that was adopted as a surname (such as Bowie from *Buidhe* or Bane from *Bàn*) or if it originally had a *Mac-* prefix which was later removed, but it may be worth following the latter possibility for a moment.

The modern Scottish Gaelic term *darach* is originally a genitive, *dair* being the old nominative. The name *Macc Dara* appears in the Book of Armagh[85] and the names *Mac-dara* and *Mac-daro* appear in Irish geneaologies.[86] There is also a St. *Mac Dara* in Connemara.[87] The prefix *Mac-* was frequently removed from names on the buffer zone between the Galldachd and Gàidhealtachd during the Middle Ages as people switched from Gaelic to Lallans, although it was not so common in the Gaelic speaking west.[88] The precedents of Lowland names can be seen to have had an effect on the shape that surnames in the Gàidhealteachd took,[89] so it may be that the variants of the Lowland name Darroch had a gravitational pull on similar Gaelic names connected with the oak.

Tales explaining the origin of the name often link it to a person of the name Mac Gille Riabhaich, sometimes claiming that Darroch derives from this latter name — a highly unlikely explanation in terms of phonology. This character often has an oak cudgel or stick in his hand, with which he

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[83] M. A. O'Brien 1976, §148.a.15, §152.a.4; it also appears in a poem c. 800, Gerard Murphy 1956, p. 87. A similar example is the name *Clann Fidchuire*, in M. A. O' Brien 1976, §160.a.33.
[84] George Black 1926, 'Darroch'.
[85] *ibid.*
[86] M. A. O' Brien 1976, pp. 48, 364.
[87] Donncha Ó Corráin and Fidelma Maguire 1981, p. 128.
[88] George Black 1926, pp. xxv, xxxix-xli; Frank Adam and Sir Thomas Innes 1970, p. 398.
[89] George Black 1926, pp. xl (note 75), xli.

performs an exploit which gives him his name. The incident ranges from short exclamations such as *'Is darach mo bhat' agus is Darach mì fhèin* [my cudgel is an oak, and I myself am Oak]'[90] to much longer anecdotes such as the following:

> A party of Macdonalds invaded one of the Outer Hebrides, and Mac Gille Riabhaich accompanied them. At that time he was a powerful youth, and always carried a stout oak cudgel... [he] plied his oak staff with such effect that they fled in all directions. He then seized the pot, and by placing the oak stick through the suspender, swung it over his shoulder, and carried it away... For this daring exploit Mac Gille Riabhaich received the sobriquet of Darach or Darroch, which is Gaelic for an oak...
> The story of Mac Gille Riabhaich is confirmed by the fact, that when this last-named Duncan Darroch, having made a fortune in Jamaica, went to the Heralds Office to matriculate family arms and to prove his right to assume those of Macdonald, the Lyon King at Arms remarked, "We must not lose the memory of the old oak stick and its exploit." whereupon the arms, still borne by the family, in which the oak is prominent, were granted...[91]

A very short, and equally imaginative and suspicious, tale is in the MacLagan collection of folklore about the MacNivens of Islay:

> One of the MacNivens of Islay says that the way his people got their name was this. Long ago there was a child found at the root of a tree, and as nobody knew to whom it belonged, they called *Mac Craoibhan* (The son of trees), and it was from that child all the MacNivens are descended.[92]

Another such folk-etymology was believed by some people to explain the origin of the obscure name MacFearn, which has the appearance of meaning 'son of alder':

> ..I once heard an old Gaelic song sung which described how a Highland chief, when walking by a river side, found a newly born child entangled in a *fearn* or alder bush which overhung the river... as the chief did not know his clan, and was unwilling to give him his own clan name for fear he would not turn out a brave warrior... he called him 'Mac Fearn':
>
> *Their roinn gur leis a' bhradan thu*
> *'S roinn eile leis an dobhran donn*
> *No gur maighdean-mara bu mhàthair dhuit*
> *No ròn fiadhaich nan tonn.*
>
> *Ach cò bu mhàthair no athair dhuit*
> *Gu bràth cha bhi fios*
> *Fhuair mi 'n croch' 's a' phreas fhearn thu*

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[90] Donald Budge 1960, p. 160.
[91] John Dixon 1886, p. 28.
[92] *Tocher* vol. 25, p. 49.

Agus Mac Fearn bidh ort a-nis.[93]

Some say that you belong to the salmon
And others that you are the brown otter's
And others that the mermaid was your mother
Or the wild seal of the waves.

But whoever was your mother or father
Will never be known
I found you hanging in the alder bush
And you will be called Alder's son now.

Tree names are more commonly in use in clan nick-names. I have already mentioned *Seumas a' Ghiuthais* [James of the Pine] MacDonald of Braemar in the first Chapter, after whom the *Giuthas* [Pine] MacDonalds were called. The descendents of the septs of the Lochaber MacMillans of Lagganfern, Glenpeanbeg and Kinlocharkaig were called in Gaelic *Clann Iain Lèith na Coille* [the people of Gray Iain of the forest].[94]

Specific trees with special clan associations

There are a number of examples in Gaelic tradition of specific trees which have a special significance to some family, dynasty or clan. Such traditions not only reflect the symbolism which links humans and trees, but may also be lingering reverberations of the inaugural *bile* of ancient Gaeldom (to be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four). The traditions of the appearance and felling of at least some of the ancient *bile*s of Ireland was associated with the rise, or fall, of dynasties.[95] One Irish poem, probably from the late sixteenth century, laments the downfall of a *bile* and the social and cultural loss that that connotates when the hill that once supported it comes into the hands of the enemy: *'Cnoc na gcongháir, crádh na sgol / a n-orláimh námhad a-niodh* [The hill of the exclaimations (it is) the torment of the schools / (since it is) in the hands of enemies today]'.[96]

It would be misleading to suggest that trees alone, to the exclusion of other natural phenomena, fulfilled the role of the harbingers of fortune or misfortune, for other sorts of omens can also be found in Gaelic tradition.

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[93] *The Highlander* 13 April 1878.
[94] Somerled MacMillan 1971, p. 85.
[95] Alden Watson 1981, pp. 169-170. See also *Sìlva Gadelica*, p. 77, for the Irish tale 'Aided Dhiarmada' in which the king has a vision in which a huge tree which is felled, which is interpreted as being himself toppled at the hands of his enemies.
[96] *IBP*, poem 10, §9.

Trees, however, are the most common and most prominent 'markers of fate', and their complex of ancient cosmological roles and associations give them special significance in this context.

The most common form of this belief is that when a special tree withers or dies, the family, dynasty or clan with which it is associated will also come to an end, very similar to the idea of the birth-tree discussed in Chapter One.

The Hays of Errol are the best known example of this, a Perthshire family based near the firth of the Tay and hence in contact with Gaeldom for a considerable period. Hence we should not be surprised if Gaelic traditions referred to them, albeit in Lallans dress. Sir James Frazer of the Golden Bough cites information from two books, one of them being *The Bridal of Caolchairn* [97] which quotes an unnamed 'ancient MS.' and the oral tradition of old Perthshire folk, of which I have yet to find further corroboration. The famous description, calling upon the prophecy of Thomas the Rhymer for testimony, is as follows:

> There was formerly in the neighbourhood of Errol and not far from the Falcon stone, a vast oak of an unknown age, and upon which grew a profusion of the plant; many charms and legends were considered to be connected with the tree, and the duration of the family Hay was said to be united with its existence...
>
> While the mistletoe bats on Errol's aik,
> And that aik stands fast,
> The Hays shall flourish, and their good grey hawk,
> Shall nocht flinch before the blast.
> But when the root of the aik decays,
> And the mistletoe dwines on its withered breast,
> The grass shall grow on Errol's hearth-stane,
> And the corbie roup in the falcon's nest.[98]

There are reasons for suspecting this to be an antiquarian invention by which Frazer was duped. Mistletoe is rare in Scotland, to the point that there is no native Gaelic term for it (the term *an t-uile-ioc* is simply a Gaelic translation of the generic term 'all-heal'). Ramsay of Ochtertyre, writing at the end of the 18th century and knowing of the neo-Druidic antiquarian craze of his time, says: 'It is somewhat remarkable that the Highlanders should have no tradition about the mistletoe...'.[99]

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[97] John Hay Allan 1822.
[98] Sir James Frazer 1935, pp. 283-4.
[99] John Ramsay 1888, p. 454.

Antiquarianism and neo-Druidism were much in vogue in the later 18th century, mistletoe being a salient ingredient. The year that *The Bridal of Caolchairn* was published, 1822, is notorious for the activities of inventors of 'clan traditions', for this was the year of King George's visit to Edinburgh. The author was involved in that infamous composition of both fact and fancy *The Lays of the Deer Forest*, and his contributions to an unpublished document on the history of the Hays were considered at the time by an expert to be mostly the product of 'the imagination of Mr. Allan himself.'[100] The prophecy attributed to Thomas is not to be found in the earliest definitive edition of his prophecies,[101] although it is true that many 'floating verses' were eventually attributed to him.

Nevertheless, very similar beliefs can be found throughout Gaeldom and even in the Scottish Lowlands. 'A branch falling from an oak, the "edgewell tree," standing near Dalhousie Castle, portended mortality in the family.'[102]

In Gaelic Braemar '...the old tree, which is shooting forth young branches, and is believed to foreshadow the fortunes of the Invercauld family...'.[103] A tree called *Bat' Chloinne Artair* was associated with the MacArthurs, and was prevented from being cut down.[104]

An anecdote from Braemar shows an interesting reversal of this theme, although the story has only been preserved in translation:

> The Baillie Mor hanged Inverey an' his sons on a tree before their ain door, and got his land for his trouble. Their peer auld mither was put out o' her sense by this cruelty, and in her raving madness she prophesied that the tree would be green when his tribe would be as landless and sonless as he had made her.[105]
>
> ...she cursed the clan, and predicted their downfall in a Gaelic rhyme, one verse of which I have thus translated by a friend:
>
> This tree will flourish high and broad
> Green as it grows today
> When from the banks o' bonnie Dee
> Clann Fhionnlaidh 's all away.[106]

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100 Rev. John B. Pratt 1859, p. 352.

101 *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceloune*, (ed.) James Murray, 1875, English Early Texts Society. Although the prophecy does appear in the later *Thomas the Rymour and his Rhymes*, ed. John Geddie, 1920, Edinburgh, it has most likely been taken from John Hay Allan.

102 John Dalyell 1834, p. 504. See also James Mackinlay 1893, p. 238.

103 John Grant 1876, p. 168.

104 NLS MS 14990, p. 320.

105 John Michie 1908, p. 132.

106 John Grant 1876, p. 55.

Trees can also be linked to families, such as this MacNab line of blacksmiths, a profession which had a highly revered position in ancient Gaelic society:

> A well known prediction about the family was long current, to the effect that when the last son to succeed his father as hereditary smith should die, an old elm, whose mighty boughs overshadowed the smithy, would fall. This prediction was fulfilled long after I had grown up to womanhood, about the end of the eighteenth century. On the night that the old grandfather lay a-dying, a wild storm swept down the Glen. In the morning he was dead, and the elm lay prostrate before the smithy door.[107]

Trees are also prominent in prophecies, appearing as 'time markers' or harbingers. There was a prediction of the downfall of the Campbells of Inverary when a tree grew through a certain stone.[108] It was believed that the castle of Inverary itself was to be destroyed when a certain *craobh sgithich* [hawthorn tree] split.[109]

Even more interesting in the use of metaphor are the predictions of 'The Lady of Lawers', given here in translation:[110]

> She said that a tree, which probably she herself planted, would grow near the church, and at various stages of its growth certain events of importance would happen. When the tree reached the height of the gables of the church the Church of Scotland would be rent in twain... When the tree attained the height of the ridge the house of Balloch, Taymouth would be without an heir... The Lady further predicted with regard to the tree that whoever should cut it down would be sure to come to an evil end.
> The only prophecy of the Lady with regard to the Macnab lands is to the effect that they would be added to the Breadalbane estates when a broken branch from a fir-tree would fall on another fir-tree, and then grow as part of the tree on which it fell.[111]

Clan plant-badges

Although the identity marker of clan identity in the modern popular mind is the tartan, the older identity marker was known as the *suaicheantas*, or plant-badge, whose Gaelic etymology means something equivalent to 'recognition facilitator'. Father Alan defines it as the 'badge as of a clan, as heather of Macdonalds'.[112] The account by Lachlan Shaw states that 'Every

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107 K. W. Grant 1925, p. 48.
108 NLS MS 14990, p. 316; NLS MS 14989, p. 112.
109 NLS MS 14990, p. 272.
110 Some of the Gaelic originals may be found in NLS MS 14989, p. 151.
111 Rev. W. Gillies 1938, pp. 249, 252.
112 Father Alan MacDonald 1958, p. 232.

clan had a distinguishing badge, whereby they might be known, as they had no military habit or livery.'[113] Although the *suaicheantas* was not always the leaf from a tree, as the Macdonald example shows, tree symbolism and associations are so entangled with the use and significance of the *suaicheantas* that it merits our close attention.

The badge could be placed on top of a pole — 'the Glencoe men...had for their ensigne a faire bush of heath... on the head of a staff'[114] — or worn in the bonnet of a warrior for individual identification — 'Their badges were natural and plain (not ribbons, feathers, or such gew-gaws) which they wore in their bonnets'.[115] Examples of both of these can be found in Gaelic poetry:

> *'S math thig fàbhar 'nam boineid...*[116]
> A 'favour' looks handsome in their bonnets...
>
> *Nuair a thogta leibh bratach*
> *Fraoch daitht' agus pìoban...*[117]
>
> When you would raise the banner,
> Colourful heather and pipes...

Kermack makes an important observation when he states that the significance of plant-badges goes beyond just heraldry and recognition during warfare. Neighbouring clans sometimes wore the same plant-badge, and the plants chosen were sometimes apt to wither or otherwise be difficult to see or recognise if their function was simply identification.[118] Thus we should consider other factors to explain the origins of the badges, and trees in particular give us some useful clues.

The first question to ask might be: where did the idea originate? We can find a number of precedents which were available to Scottish Gaelic society in the Middle Ages from which they could draw upon. The use of identity markers in war is noted as early as Caesar, when he writes: '...he had recognised their Gallic arms and the crests of their helmets.'[119] The early Gaels decorated their helmets, shields and weapons with animal designs, as archaeology and passages in Gaelic sagas testify: '...They bore white shields

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113 Lachlan Shaw 1882, vol. II, p. 137.
114 Letter from the Wodrow MS, dated 1678, quoted in W. R. Kermack 1953, p. 185.
115 Lachlan Shaw 1882, vol. II, p. 137.
116 Donald Ross 1970, p. 5, quoted from *D*, c. 1664.
117 *AD*, p. 8, 'Òran do Mhac 'ic Alasdair'.
118 W. R. Kermack 1946, p. 42.
119 *The Conquest of Gaul*, §I.22.

ornamented with animal designs in gold.'[120] Although the exact meaning of Pictish symbols is still hotly debated, they undoubtedly were signs of some sort that might have been used to designate clan groups.

There are some important clues given by Meek in his research on the banners of the Fian. His observations about the use of banners and identity markers are particularly appropriate: 'The carrying of banners or other portable symbols by men of authority, whether political, religious, or military, has a long history and occurs widely. Often they are seen to have some innate power and are not merely for identification.'[121] This last remark may be relevant regarding the choice of some badges on account of their magical properties.

Meek furthermore notes that the use of banners was an early development of Germanic peoples, that they are mentioned in *Beowulf* and that Bede alludes to their use among the Anglo-Saxon nobility. Banners, some described as being autonomous weapons, were common in Norse legend. This Norse practice was probably the main inspiration for the idea of banners among the Fian. A cross-over, between banners and plant-badge *suaicheantas* might be seen in two of these banners: Osgar's was said to have displayed a rowan tree and Diarmad's a yew tree.[122]

The Normans constituted another Nordic wave which developed this practice into what became known as heraldry. It was no doubt feudalism, and its accompanying heraldry, that provided the crucible for the ideas available in Gaeldom to come together and form the actual practice of *suaicheantas*: 'Indeed heraldry spread across the Highlands just as quickly as it spread over the whole of Europe, and was well established amongst West Coast chiefs by the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries...'.[123]

The next question might be: what principles led a clan to choose a particular badge? They would first of all be limited by the plants readily available within their natural environment during most of the year, but amongst those available, the choice might make some symbolic statement, relating to the landscape of their homeland, making a play on words,

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120 C. O'Rahilly 1976, p. 212. A description of decorated arms in a Scottish Gaelic folktale recorded in the 20th century can be found in K. C. Craig 1944, p. 34.

121 Donald Meek 1986, p. 33.

122 *ibid*, p. 36.

123 Frank Adam and Sir Thomas Innes 1970, p. 515.

recalling a tale of their ancestors, or using foliage as a charm against harm during warfare. There seems to be examples of all of these.

The idea of the latter may seem strange to us now, but it was often the practice, as attested in folktale, folklore and poetry, that warriors received a blessing and charm for their safe-keeping before leaving for battle. There are accounts of this even in the First World War. There is support for the idea of an upheld plant charm in the similar practice of the *clach bhuadhach*, a venerated stone carried into battle on a pole for good luck. Examples include *Clach na Brataich* of Clan Robertson[124] and *Clach Bhàn na Buidseachd* of Clan Gregor.[125]

With these general principles established, I will go through the reliable existing documentation that dates before 1822 and discuss why each particular *suaicheantas* may have been chosen. (After 1822, as I explained above, too much clan 'tradition' becomes invented for the record to be totally reliable.)

If the year 1520, ascribed to the poem by tradition, is correct, and if we can take the tree reference as an allusion to the plant-badge, the first clan for whom we have evidence is the Camerons: *''S iar-ogha Dhòmhnuill Duibh bho'n darach...* [and the great-grandsom of Dòmhnull Dubh from the oak-wood]'.[126]

Why the oak? This tree is characteristic of the Cameron territory, and especially of the residence of the chieftain, as attested by this early record in MacFarlane's *Geographical Collections*:

> ...There is great numbers of Oaktrees, and one bigg wood of Oak on the Northsyde of Loghyeld... And the same wood pertains to the Laird of Loghyeld being the Chieff and Principall house of the Clancameron.[127]

In the late 1700s Ailean Dall says, in a manner very similar to the first statement: *'Bho Chlann Chamshroin an daraich...* [from Clan Cameron of the oak-wood]'.[128]

An additional reference to the Cameron oak in a poem of 1784 provides further confirmation that their traditional badge was not the crowberry, as some have claimed:

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124 J. Y. Simpson 1860-2, pp. 219-20.
125 W. G. Stewart 1851, p. 151.
126 Mary MacKellar 1886, p. 212, 'B'fheàrr leam gun sgrìobhteadh dhuit fearann'.
127 Walter MacFarlane 1906, vol. II, p. 159.
128 *AD*, p. 176, 'Cumha do dh'Fhear Lònndabhra'.

Nuair a thogar do bhratach ri crann
Chithear darach 's an àm 'ga chur suas...[129]

When your banner is raised to the pole
Oak is then seen being lifted up...

There are very explicit references to the MacGregor *suaicheantas* at the very beginning of the 1600's, about 1603 and 1604, in two poems:

Nuair a rùisg sibh an t-iubhar
'S a ghlaodh sibh 'Bad giuthais'...[130]

When you pulled out the yew bow
And you shouted 'Pine clump'...

Mu MhacGriogair a Ruadhshruth...
D' am bu shuaicheantas giuthas...[131]

About MacGregor of Roro
To whom pine was suaicheantas...

The pine in the first case appears to be a war cry, while in the last case the pine is named as a plant-badge. What is the significance of the Scots pine? Even this term in English underlines its close association with Scotland (at least after supplies in Ireland were exhausted, sometime between the 7th and 12th centuries[132]). 'The etymology of the word *giuthas* is unknown and there is no evidence of it being a loan-word',[133] and so it is likely to have pre-Gaelic Scottish ancestry. Likewise, the MacGregors have numerous traditions about their royal origins in ancient Scotland,[134] such as the quatrain beginning *'Sliochd nan Rìghrean dùthchasach* [the race of the indigenous kings]' and the proverb beginning *'Cnoic is uisg' is Ailpeinich* [hills, water and the MacAlpines (of whom the MacGregors latterly claimed to be a branch)]... meaning that the MacGregors are as old as the hills'.[135]

The proverb explicitly dealing with the symbolism of the MacGregor badge also mentions the MacDonalds: *'Cruaidh mar am fraoch, buan mar an*

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129 *UC*, p. 153, song to Lochiall by Archibald MacDonald.
130 Derick Thomson 1955, p. 17, 'Ruaig Ghlinne Freòin'.
131 *BG*, l. 6285, 6289, 'MacGriogair á Ruadhshruth'.
132 Fergus Kelly 1976b, p. 111.
133 *ibid*, p. 113. We don't know, of course, if later Gaels were aware of these linguistic origins and borrowings.
134 Some of these spurious later traditions are discussed in W. D. H. Sellar 1981, pp. 109-10.
135 See *NGP*, p. 167, for both of these quotes, and William Gillies 1982, p. 73, for a variation of the last.

giuthas'.[136] Scots pine is thus stated not only to be indigenous, but to be resilient and lasting, which is a fitting emblem given the recurring troubles in MacGregor history.

The word *fraoch* has two meanings in Gaelic, 'heather' and 'rage', both probably reflecting a root meaning 'bristle'.[137] It is thus an appropriate, and suitably ambiguous term, for a war-like clan sporting the heather plant-badge to use, even though it makes the definite interpretation of poetry more challenging. *Fraoch* appears, possibly implying both meanings, in a poem from about 1590 to Angus MacDonald of Dùn Naomhaig:

> *An síth do rogha, a Rígh Fionnghall,*
> *No an fraoch cogaidh, a chúl slim?...*
> *Ní érfuinn tu um tabhairt ccogaidh*
> *dod chúl mbachlach mar bharr fraoich...*[138]
>
> Is peace your choice, o King of the Hebrides
> Or the fraoch of war, o shiny haired one?
> I would not refuse you about bringing war,
> Your tressed curls like tufts of heather...

The MacDonald heather also appears in some variations of the song *'Biodh an deoch-s' an làimh mo rùin* [May this drink be in my beloved's hand]', tentatively dated to the middle of the seventeeth century.[139] In a version in the Dornie MS the heroine recognises the Clann Raghnaill birlinn of her people by the *'bad fraoich 's an t-slat siùil* [tuft of heather in the yardarm].'[140]

The first definite dateable appearance of the MacDonald emblem is in Iain Lom's poetry, such as in his song to Glengarry in about 1675, in which he uses the phrase: *'Clann Dòmhnaill an fhraoich* [Clan Donald of the heather]...'.[141]

There is, however, a reference in the Book of Clanranald, compiled by Niall MacMhuirich in the late seventeenth century from older materials, which implies that the heather may have a much older currency, especially among the Glencoe MacDonalds: *'Do bhí mac oile ag Aonghus .i. Eoin og an*

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136 *NGP*, p. 171.
137 Donald Meek 1984, pp. 10-2.
138 William J. Watson 1923, pp. 36, 37.
139 Colm Ó Baoill and Donald MacAulay 1988, item 429.
140 Colm Ó Baoill 1997, p. 103; see also a version collected by Rev. Alasdair MacLean Sinclair in *TGSI* 26, p. 237.
141 *OIL*, l. 1672, 'Òran do Mhorair Ghlinne Garaidh'. He also mentions the heather as *suaicheantas* in the poem 'A Bhean, Leasaich an Stòp dhuinn', l. 1823, in approximately the same time period.

fhraoich, or shiolaighe clann Eaain Gline comhan re an raitear clann Domnaill an Fhraoich [Angus had another son, namely, young Eoin of the *fraoch*, from whom are descended Clan Iain of Glencoe who are called Clan Donald of the heather].'[142]

Which one of the two meanings of *fraoch* was originally given to Eoin as his nick-name, and why, escaped even the probings of the authors of Clan Donald: 'Why he was called John Òg of the Heather we have now no means of ascertaining...'.[143] Whatever the origin, this title may have been used by someone looking for a plant-badge for the Clan Donald. Heather, as the aforementioned proverb has testified, is tough and was probably the most versatile and important of Highland plants. I believe another significance to the heather and its choice by the MacDonalds is the fact that it is virtually omnipresent in the Highland landscape.

If a proverbial saying, which I have only seen in translation, actually goes back to the Battle of Inverlochy, then we have evidence of the Campbell plant-badge, for it was said that on that day: 'the heather (of the MacDonalds) was above the bog myrtle (of the Campbells)'.[144]

The Grants also have the Scots pine as their *suaicheantas*, attested to in a poem by Iain Lom composed in 1660: *'Chuireadh giuthas ri crann* [Scots pine was set up on the pole]...'.[145] This may well be due to archaising attempts to place the Grants, of Anglo-Norman origin, into a Gaelic scheme of things once they had 'gone native'.[146]

The Frasers, also of Anglo-Norman origin, used the wild strawberry (an allusion to the French word *fraise*) in their armorial bearings.[147] Their *suaicheantas*, however, appears in historical descriptions from the late seventeenth century (I have yet to see it appear in poetry) and also indicates that they have 'gone native' in their selection of a plant-badge:

> The earliest instance so far noted of a Fraser using this badge is in 1689, when an eye-witness describes Fraser of Culduthel wearing it while with "Bonnie Dundee's" army. The Jacobite Frasers mustered at Castle Downie in 1745 wore yew in their bonnets as well as white cockades... In the sixteenth century the clan

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142 *RC* II, p. 158.
143 A. & A. MacDonald 1900, p. 190.
144 W. R. Kermack 1953, p. 186. He quotes this from I. F. Grant, *In the Tracks of Montrose*, p. 187; John Buchan, 1938, *Montrose*, p. 194.
145 *OIL*, l. 891, 'Do Mhac Fhionghuin an t-Sratha'.
146 John L. Roberts 1997, pp. 80-81.
147 James Fraser 1905, p. 32.

frequently mustered on Tomnahurich, near Inverness; some may like to conjecture that the badge was thus derived.[148]

The reason for the convergence of the clan upon *Tom na h-Iùbhraich* seems to be that it had a sacred significance to the clan (further discussion in Chapter Four). As the place-name itself suggests, it is a knoll, above a graveyard, upon which a large yew tree grows. The yew was said to 'have been large enough to shelter all the Stratherrick Frasers'.[149] There are a number of other traditions which suggest that this yew was originally a *bile*. The significance of this *suaicheantas*, then, is as a charm taken from the clan *bile*.

A further example of the charm plant-badge seems likely in the choice of *Achlasan Chaluim Cille* [St. John's wort] for the Mackinnons. There is a tradition of this plant being used by the saint to keep himself safe from the dangers of the night and its choice by the Mackinnons is likely to reflect their close association with the abbacy of Iona in the 15th century.[150]

According to one clan historian, the Menzieses have the right to wear 3 plant-badges, the rowan, the club moss and the heather. A clan connection with the rowan may be indicated by a highly ornamented chair wrought for the visit of Queen Mary in 1564, upon which the leaves of the rowan are engraved.[151] All five of the examples of Gaelic poetry given as evidence (the sources and dates of these quotations are unfortunately not given) for their plant-badge, however, mention only the heather. The most vivid of these is:

B' àlainn dealbhach am brèid sròil
Air a cheangal ri crann caol
An robh caisteal, bradan is long;
Dearg-iolair is craobh
Bha fraoch os cionn sin gu h-àrd
Ceangailt' am barr a chroinn chaoil...[152]

Handsome is the silken banner
Fastened to a slender pole
On which is a castle, salmon and ship;
A red eagle and a tree
There was heather above that on high
Fastened to the top of the slender pole...

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148 Charles Ian Fraser 1979, p. 30.
149 Donald Armstrong Ross 1970, p. 5.
150 W. R. Kermack 1946, p. 42.
151 D. P. Menzies 1894, p. 194.
152 *ibid*, p. 493.

The badge of the Robertsons is *raithneach* [bracken] and it appears in their armorial bearings in the records of the Lyon Court,[153] although I have not found any references to it in early Gaelic literature. There is a folk tradition about its origin, but at the end of the version recorded by the Rev. Charles Robertson he notes a far more likely reason for this choice:

> "A man who was passing through the country sought lodgings at a house for the night and was put to sleep in a bed under a window. The night being stormy, a bundle of bracken was thrust into the window to close it. In the course of the night the bracken was dislodged by the violence of the wind and fell on top of the sleeper. He started up in alarm crying out, "Are you come to avenge on me the death of Robertson?" The bracken having thus been the means of discovering the murderer of one of their number was adopted by the Robertsons as their badge."
>
> A sufficient explanation of the adoption of the bracken by the Robertsons is the identity of the Gaelic name of the bracken by *rai[th]neach* with the name of a district Gaelic *Rai[th]neach* with which the Robertsons were closely connected...[154]

This word-play thus seems to be a symbolic reference to the homeland territory of Clan Robertson. Another reference to the flora of homeland appears in *The Loyall Dissuasive* (1701), where it is noted that the Scots pine (also called the fir tree) was added to the Clan Chattan badge, and to the Mackintosh arms, 'in commemoration of Rothemurchus from whence they came, and where there grows so many firrs'.[155]

None of the plant-badges attested in these Gaelic sources pertains to ignoble trees, only noble ones, such as the fir, oak, holly and yew. This suggests that the traditional tree hierarchy might have influenced the selection, or avoidance, of particular plants as badges. Plant-badges found in clan books beginning in the 19th century, however, contain a number of claims for clan badges of ignoble trees and shrubs, but it is difficult now to determine when and why they were chosen and whether the traditional Gaelic tree taxonomy had any influence in their choices.

Once these initial choices had been made, displaced septs or fissured clans in new locales could have carried their original badges with them, testifying to their original relationship with other clans with the same badge. Clan alliances also seem to share common plant-badges, which would not be surprising if they were used to distinguish between allies and foes in warfare.

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153 Frank Adam and Sir Thomas Innes 1970, p. 511.

154 NLS MS 392 (Robertson Collection), p. 44. 'Heard in 1905 from an aged native of Glen [?] a Stewart whose forefathers had occupied the same places for hundreds of years.'

155 W. R. Kermack 1953, p. 185; Donald Ross 1970, p. 5.

Thus it is that the whole Clan Donald group — including the Macalisters, the Macintyres (of Clan Donald descent) and the MacQueens of Skye use heather. Three Lennox clans are credited with badges that appear to be variants of that of the Macfarlanes, who are a branch of the old earls of Lennox, and one Atholl clan is credited with a badge that appears to be a variant of that of the Robertsons, who were the descendants of the old earls of Atholl.[156]

As opposed to this 'ancestral inheritance' of *suaicheantas* is the notion that the plant badge 'sticks to' the territory, and new clan formations emerging in the old territory carry on with the old badge of the territory. It has been suggested that Butcher's Broom, which is claimed by the Sutherlands and Murrays, is the old Moray badge.[157]

The Clan Chattan group, and the Mackintoshes in particular, demonstrate the complexity and inconsistency one encounters when trying to sort out the details of the *suaicheantas*. *The Loyal Dissuasive* of 1701 claims that the Clan Chattan wore heather as their badge, which is consistent with their alliances with the Lords of the Isles.[158]

Lachlan Shaw's brief 1775 account mentions that the Mackintoshes wore a holly branch (I have not found any mention in verse of their badge). Interestingly, Sobieski Stuart claimed holly for the MacDuffs of Fife, who, according to tradition, have a common ancestry with the Mackintoshes.[159] Later historians, however, credit Clan Chattan with the red whortleberry.[160]

The causes for confusion in the search for 'authentic' plant-badges should be clear from the discussions above. The Highland political landscape was never static, and clans were constantly forming new alliances, constructing new identities and moving into new areas. As all of these processes are at the heart of the symbolism of the *suaicheantas*, it is to be expected that the evidence will not always be straightforward.

Although it would be ideal if these plants could be verified by examining heraldic seals and armorial bearings, Gaelic symbolism only sometimes makes the transition into official records. Although some plant-badges are

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156 W. R. Kermack 1946, p. 43.

157 Frank Adam and Sir Thomas Innes 1970, p. 544.

158 W. R. Kermack 1953, p. 185; R. W. Munro 1981, p. 126.

159 Donald Ross 1970, p. 6. See MacFarlane's *Genealogical Collections* vol.. I, for this tradition.

160 Donald Ross 1970, pp. 5-6 and Frank Adam and Sir Thomas Innes 1970, pp. 543-4 discuss the evidence.

indeed to be found in the armorial bearings, the evidence is sometime contradictory and is inconclusive without further detailed investigation.

The use of the *suaicheantas* continued to have significant emotive power in the nineteenth century Highlands, for we find it being used particularly by the military (and indeed the uniforms of the 'Invercauld Highlanders' continued to display the Scots pine into the twentieth century[161]). A poem by a Loch Rannoch MacGregor describes the Scots pine badge being held aloft in their efforts to recruit soldiers at a local fair in the early 1800's:

Nuair a sgaoilt' libh sròl uain'
Craobh de'n ghiuthas air mar shuaicheantas...[162]

When you unfurled a green silk (banner)
(With) a branch of the Scots pine on it as a *suaicheantas...*

By the end of the nineteenth century, when many were attempting to forge solidarity amongst Gaels in the attempts to achieve land reform and address other Highland issues, Màiri Mhòr urged her fellow exiled Gaels to wear the heather as the *suaicheantas* of their identity as Gaels and to express their attachment to the Highlands:

Thoir badan dh'ionnsaidh gach laoich
Tha 'cumail cuimhn' air tìr an gràidh...[163]

Give a tuft (of it) to every champion
Who retains memory of his beloved land...

Chapter Conclusions

The forest is an important metaphor for groups of people in Gaelic literature, whether they are war bands, families or the extended Gaelic world as a whole. Some of this appears at a lexical level, where words whose primary meanings relate to trees can equally be applied to the family tree.

More common, and more powerful in the hands of poets, is the forest as symbol of human community. As Chapter One has illustrated, Gaelic tradition very easily and naturally relates individual humans with trees, and so the extension of the metaphor simply relates groups of humans with

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161 Frank Adam and Sir Thomas Innes 1970, p. 543.
162 Donncha MacIntoisich 1831, p. 36.
163 Màiri Nic-a-Phearsoin 1891, p. 35, 'Fraoch, Neònain agus Sobhrach'.

forests and groves, sometimes so subtlely as to fool modern audiences into taking the tree images literally rather than figuratively.

It also, of course, reflects the dependency of people upon woodlands for resources. An interpretation of the poem which does not take the Gaelic penchant for representing people as trees into account is likely to miss out on some of the more subtle themes of the poem and I have tried to show how the well known poem *A' Choille Ghruamach* has similarly been less than fully appreciated to date.

In a kin-based society where one's identity, role and obligations are largely defined by one's predecessors, what is said about an individual by implication is also said about his kin and vice-versa. Thus, praising the family — or the forest, in tree terms — strongly suggests the praise of the individuals of that family — the trees, in tree terms — and vice versa. One of the most common lines drawing upon the symbolism of forests for the praise of an individual is (variations of the phrase) *'B' ùr a' choill' 'san d'rinn thu fàs* [The forest in which you grew was flourishing]', which sometimes leads the poet into opening up the forest symbolism in various ways, often in describing the individual as a tree.

In such a kin-based society, it was very important for heirs to be born, and thus vitality and virility are common themes. Almost all of the other arboreal elements of the panegyric code discussed in Chapter One also appear in the praise of the family with similar implications: the good quality of the family is emphasised by denying any *crìonach* in it and by associating it with noble trees; the importance of the founder ancestor or ancestral *dùthchas* is signified by the naming of the roots of the tree; the resilience of the family against hardships is expressed by stating that the tree withstands the elements; and so on.

As in Chapter One, poets from areas (or familiar with areas) where trees were to be found in the environment around them made the best and most imaginative use of tree symbolism. Sinton's Badenoch collection does not dominate here as strongly it did in Chapter One, but examples from Lochaber, and MacDonald and MacLean mainland territory are quite common.

The further extension of this metaphor to refer to Gaeldom as a whole is a somewhat late, but very productive, development. It is not surprising, given the anxiety of the Gaelic community about its own survival since the seventeenth century, that nearly all of the examples of tree symbolism relate

to the question of whether or not the tree will live or if new sprouts will rise again from the withered stump.

The idea of the tree as birth-token, discussed in Chapter One, can also be seen to have been extended to families, dynasties and clans. Although there were a number of diverse influences which came to bear upon the selection and use of *suaicheantas* for the Highland clans, tree lore and symbolism certainly feature strongly.

All of this underlines the extension of the idea that seems to have great currency in the Gaelic psyche that trees and humans share some essential qualities, whether as individuals or groups.

Chapter 3

Trees as Resources

All societies draw upon the resources of nature to sustain human life and there are quite a number of ways in which trees were put to use, in almost every sphere of activity. This is particularly true in the well-forested areas of the Gàidhealtachd, where people developed many different uses for the many kinds of trees available to them. Although some of these uses are what would be deemed 'material culture', and hence not subjects to be dealt with in any great detail in this thesis, they do form part of the larger context of life in the Gàidhealtachd, and contain much information about the relationship between people and their environment. Aspects of material culture often enter Gaelic oral tradition, from the backdrop of folktales to the analogies in proverbs.

Even beyond these aspects of material culture, trees are 'exploited' in ways which are symbolic or abstract: trees are not merely a physical resource, but an intellectual and cultural resource. Economics do not stand apart from, or preside over, the other aspects of culture, but are part of an interdependent system of belief and behaviour. It is important to realise that the way in which wood was exploited, and the particular wood chosen for exploitation, was influenced by and integrated into patterns of tradition, ritual and belief, and that tradition and belief can also reflect their economic importance. By considering tree exploitation in that context we can gain a more complete understanding of Gaelic folk-life as a whole.

Trees provided dietary supplements to people and livestock and the importance of these foodstuffs seems to contribute to the high status of the apple and hazel trees in Gaelic society. The design and construction of homes, the most fundamental of the many aspects of domestic life, varied greatly depending upon the resources available. As the hearth symbolises the life of a home,[1] timber can be seen as one of the essential 'life-forces' for its existence.

Many of the basic accoutrements of the warrior were made of wood and the description and praise of the warrior, already demonstrated in Chapter

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[1] E. Estyn Evans 1957, p. 59; I. F. Grant 1961, pp. 161-2.

One to draw upon a large body of tree images, often refers to these timber items with the same set of conventions. The warriors of the Western seaboard and islands were also associated with boats, made of wood, and the overlap between praise of warrior and boat draws upon common tree themes.

Different kinds of timber suit different kinds of purposes and grow better in some environments than others. Thus, during many centuries of observation and experimentation, Gaelic tradition has amassed a great deal of lore regarding what kinds of timber are best for particular kinds of construction, where to find it and when and how to extract it.

This opens up general questions about resource management and exploitation in the Highlands, but as these issues lie outside the bounds of literature and folk-life which constrain my thesis, I will only be considering those aspects which appear in oral tradition. A number of these aspects are actually articulated, although such matters seldom seem to come to the fore of native consciousness until the forces of the outside world begin to impinge upon the life of the Gàidhealtachd.

As the patterns of work and folk-life were largely dictated by the weather and cycle of the seasons, people paid close attention to natural phenomena which would indicate when the current time period, and the activities associated with it, were coming to an end and a new period beginning. Trees in particular are an important signal in the year's cycle and many of the ornaments and lore associated with particular holidays were tree items.

Trees and timber items were also important spiritual and ritual 'resources' which could be exploited due to their perceived special properties. They could be used in the constant protection against the supernatural forces of the Otherworld or in the practice of earthly magic.

Food and drink

It may be difficult for us today, given the degree to which we have become alienated from the production of foodstuffs, to imagine the diversity of food and food sources which people have exploited in the past. Trees were a surprisingly good source of food for both human and beast.

This seems to have been the case from the earliest times in Scotland. Archaeological excavations on the well-preserved pre-Roman crannog sites are revealing a great deal of information about life in early Scotland: 'They

supplemented their diet with a range of nuts and berries including hazelnuts, wild cherries and sloes, but they had to make an extra effort to pick cloudberries, which only grow up on the mountains.'[2]

In the obscure mnemonics of the tract *Auraicept na nÉces*, a section relating to the hazel says that *'cach ac ithi a chno* [Everyone eats its (i.e., the hazel's) nut].'[3] A bread made of hazel nuts was considered by 'the old Highlanders' to be an excellent source of enduring nourishment for long journeys.[4] 'It is difficult for non-fruitarians to realize the esteem in which nuts were held in mediaeval times as an article of diet'.[5]

The activity of nut-gathering appears in a number of songs, sometimes just as providing a 'background' setting, as in the beginning of this song:

> *Latha dhomh 's mi 'n coill' nan dearcag*
> *Feadh an fhraoich ri taobh Loch Arcaig*
> *Buain nan cnò air bharr gach slataig...*[6]
>
> One day when I was in the berry wood
> In the heather beside Loch Arkaig
> Gathering nuts on the tips of each branch...

As this activity entailed going into a wood and hence in a place far away from watchful eyes, its appears to have been a mirthful occasion giving an opportunity for lovers to meet:

> *Cnothan cruinn' air a' challtainn*
> *'S thusa, a ghràidh, 's mì 'gan tional...*[7]
>
> Clustered nuts on the hazel
> And you, my love, and I gathering them...

There are several variations of a folktale of the Fianna, in which the men, who were suffering from the lack of wild game available to eat, noticed that their women looked healthy and well-fed when they returned empty-handed from the hunt:

> ...the Fians left big Garry, the son of Morna, behind them, to endeavour to find out what secret means of nourishment the women had. He found that they lived

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[2] Dixon and Andrian 1996, p. 7.
[3] George Calder 1917, p. 92.
[4] Charles Fergusson 1878, p. 144.
[5] E. C. Quiggin 1911, p. 114. Likewise, Pliny (Book xvi.15) tells us of acorns as food and their use as meal for making bread.
[6] Malcolm MacFarlane 1908, p. 53.
[7] Thomas Sinton 1906, p. 55.

> on the leaves of trees, the roots of heather, and tops of hazel (*duillich nan craobh, bun an fhraoich*; some say *bun na raithnich; 's barr a' challtainn*)...[8]

Another variation of the tale has it thus:

> *Bha ionghnadh mòr orra, na mnathan aca fhaotainn cho reamhar geal bòidheach, oir bha an t-sealg fìor ghann... 'se am biadh a bha aca, barr a' challtainn air a bhruich, agus iad ag òl an t-sùigh.*[9]
>
> They were greatly surprised, finding that their women were so well-fed, fair and beautiful, since hunting was so scarce... The food that they had was the tops of the hazel which they boiled, and they drank the juice.

A number of different parts of the tree were seen as being useful sources of nutrition, including, it seems, the foliage of the hazel as well as its nut.

I have already mentioned the importance of the apple in Gaelic literature. The apple features prominently in association with the Otherworld, and *Emhain Abhlach* is a common name for the Otherworld island in the old Gaelic tales.[10] A visitor from the Otherworld is recognised by the apple-branch in his or her hand. The apple and hazel were ritual food items on the festival of *Samhainn* [Hallowe'en], 'the only source of delicious and satisfying fruit obtainable, and as such were full of the promise of revival and delight. In this aspect they took their place as the central life-trees of the Gaelic Elysium...'.[11] Hazel nuts can be stored for up to a year and both these and apples must have been an important supplimentary element in the diet during the winter.[12]

Apple-trees have a very long history of cultivation in a Gaelic context as the distinction between the sour wild apple and sweeter domesticated strains is expressed in early Irish sources.[13] 'There are frequent references to monastic orchards and to apples as part of the monastic diet... The frequency with which apples are referred to in the literature... indicates how highly prized they were as food.'[14]

Although I must leave the resolution to this issue with the historical linguist, there are numerous examples of the extension of the term *abhall*,

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[8] John G. Campbell 1891, p. 165.
[9] *PTWH* vol. 2, p. 305, 'Caol Reidhinn'.
[10] Brian Ó Cuiv 1955, pp. 297-8; Eleanor Hull 1928, pp. 35, 241.
[11] Eleanor Hull 1928, p. 23.
[12] Fergus Kelly 1997, pp. 306; 260.
[13] Fergus Kelly 1997, p. 259.
[14] Donncha Ó Corráin 1972, p. 53.

normally meaning 'apple tree', to mean 'orchard', such as when Màiri Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh says of Iain Garbh *'Craobh a b' àirde de'n abhall thu* [You were the tallest tree of the orchard].'[15] Although the Irish examples of the usage of the term *aball* in the RIA do show a generalisation to 'any fruit-bearing tree', or even to any kind of tree, there are no examples of it being used in a collective sense in these early examples. Professor William Gillies has pointed out to me that the term *afall* in Middle Welsh has a collective sense and a singulative ending is added in order to express 'a single apple tree'.[16] This suggests that the extension of the word *abhall* in a collective sense may possibly be due to P-Celtic influence.

On the other hand, *abhall* does appear in Dinneen's Irish Dictionary in the collective sense. This may be an example of metonymy where a larger group or entity — an orchard, in this case — can be represented by a single member from it. The Scottish Gaelic *craobh*, originally meaning 'branch', was extended to mean 'tree', and therefore might be a similar development.[17]

Wild apples were also consumed and valued, as this song of praise boasts of a young man's diet consisting of such foraged wild foods:

> *Cha b'e an t-aran tur bu bhiadh leat*
> *Biolair òg is ùbhlan fiadhaich...*[18]
>
> Dry bread would not be your food
> (but) young cress and wild apples...

The largest and finest apples grow on the young wood at the top of the tree, and this fact is given in the frequently stated Gaelic proverb: *'Bidh an t-ubhal as fheàrr air a' mheangan as àirde* [The best apple can be found on the highest branch].' This proverb is used not just literally about apples, but also to many situations in life more generally. In the dedication of his book of proverbs, the first collection to be published in Gaelic, Mackintosh says to the Earl of Buchan that '...every person of distinguished rank [should] endeavour to distinguish himself still more essentially, by being beneficial to the public, and thereby confirm our old Gaelic saying, *"Bidh am meas is fearr,"* &c.'.

The sap of trees was also used as a drink. The virtues of tree sap were such that it was practically the first thing a human being tasted: 'In many parts of

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[15] *GSMM*, l. 356.
[16] See D. Simon Evans 1964, p. 31.
[17] Thanks to Dr. Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh for these comments.
[18] John L. Campbell 1990, p. 176, 'Dòmhnallan Dubh, Dòmhnallan'.

the Highlands, at the birth of a child, the nurse or midwife, from what motive I know not, puts the end of a green stick of ash into the fire, and, while it is burning, receives into a spoon the sap or juice which oozes out at the other end, and administers this as the first spoonful of liquors to the new-born babe.'[19] While the sap may have had a perceived dietary function, this ritual of birth resembles many around the world in which a connection is made between the new-born and a token of the Tree of Life.[20]

A 'wholesome diuretic wine' was made from the birch,[21] and Alexander Carmichael tells us that 'Spruce beer was obtained from the spruce tree, as whisky was obtained from the birch tree'.[22] The *Old Statistical Account* entry for Kirkmichael in Banffshire tells us that the Highlanders used to 'extract a liquid from the birch called *fion na uisge-a-bheithe*, which they considered as very salubrious and conducive to longevity'.[23] The name *uisge-a-bheithe* seems also to be a pun on the Gaelic term *uisge-beatha*, literally 'the water of life', and the name normally given to whiskey. 'The Highlanders formerly used to distill the fruit [of the rowan] into a very good spirit.'[24] 'The berries [of the elder] were fermented into a wine, which was usually drunk warm.'[25] Even leaves were considered to impart essential minerals to water, as is reflected in the proverb *'Uisge donn na duillich, tha e ro mhath do na fearaibh òg* [The brown water of foliage is very good for young men].'[26] These examples may also reflect an underlying belief in the tree as a source of life from which people can draw.

The leaves of the birch were used as a fodder for sheep and goats.[27] In the song *Crodh Chailein*, popular throughout the Gàidhealtachd, the woman at the shieling sings to her animal companion: *'Cha tèid mi do'n bheithe / No thional nan cnò...* [I won't go to the birch-wood / Or to the nut-gathering...].'

With the foodstuffs made available by trees, it is not surprising that the tree symbolises in many ways the fruitfulness and bounty of land. This no doubt made them salient markers of the 'pathetic fallacy', which made the

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19 Charles Fergusson 1878, p. 133, quoted from Lightfoot, 1772. See also John Ramsay 1888, p. 423.
20 Mircea Eliade 1963, pp. 306-8.
21 Charles Fergusson 1878, p. 136.
22 *CG* II, p. 230.
23 *Old Statistical Account for Scotland* vol. XII, p. 452.
24 *GNP*, p. 24.
25 Charles Fergusson 1878, p. 140.
26 *NGP*, p. 420. See also Ronald Black 1996, p. 50.
27 Charles Fergusson 1878, p. 136.

causal connection between the rightful ruler and the fertility of his land. It is also not surprising that they are frequently mentioned when land is praised (this will discussed in more detail in Chapter Four).

It is also interesting to note that the apple, hazel and oak, trees which offer important foodstuffs, are noble trees. Fergus Kelly notes that 'The class into which a tree or shrub is placed depends upon its economic importance.' Food was of course of very high priority and would have strongly influenced its perceived economic value. Although the apple is small, for example, it is considered noble 'because of the importance of apples as food'.[28] The oak is listed as being among the nobles of the wood in the Irish Law Tracts on account of 'its acorns and its dignity'.[29]

At Home

One of the most ancient types of dwellings in Scotland is the *crannog*, a name reflecting in itself its construction from wood.[30] Although human-built above-water dwellings are to be found all around the world, Scotland had one of the largest concentrations of such dwellings in the prehistoric period.[31] They seem to go back as far as the Neolithic, and there is evidence of the building of crannogs as late as the 16th century:

> In the year 1580, in order that he might subdue the insolence of the Lochaber men, Mackintosh caused an island in the loch commonly called Loch Lochy, to be constructed, which was called [*Eilean Darach*], that is, the oaken island; for it was built upon oaken beams...[32]

Crannogs demonstrate that people developed skills for working with wood from a very early period, from the selection of types of wood, to coppicing, felling and construction.[33] Some crannogs continued to be occupied into the 18th century. One Gaelic-speaking early 19th century writer demonstrates that Gaelic oral tradition still attested to the high-status origins of crannogs when he explained the word 'crannack' as meaning 'an edifice of wood, the residence of a chief or other person of distinction'.[34]

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28 Fergus Kelly 1976b, p. 108.
29 *ibid*, p. 109.
30 *Crannóg* is the Irish form of the word, which has gained standard currency. The Scottish Gaelic form *crannag* exists in some place names, such as *A' Chrannag* in Poolewe (see Dwelly, p. 261).
31 Ian Morrison 1985, p. 2.
32 Walter Macfarlane 1900, *Genealogical Collections* I, p. 242 (History of the Mackintoshes).
33 Some discussion by Ian Morrison 1985, pp. 42-50.
34 James MacGregor 1824, p. 30.

The pre-Norman Insular Celts generally built their buildings of wood, whether they were dwellings or churches. Adomnán describes the gathering of material for what appears to be stick-and-wattle construction: 'Once St. Columba sent his monks to bring bundles of withies... so that they could be used in building a guest-house.'[35] In the Life of St. Kentigern, wood-working activity is described in a similar manner:

> Some cleared and levelled the situation;... some cutting down trees, others carrying them, and others fitting them together, commenced, as they had measured and marked out for them, to build a church and its offices... after the fashion of Britons, seeing that they could not yet build of stone...[36]

Stick-and-wattle type construction continued to be used for a number of purposes up to recent times, such as in the construction of small fences: 'In some cases they used movable wicker-hurdles, where birch and hazel were handy, and into one of the enclosures the cattle were driven...'[37]

One of the major factors in the development of different styles of housing in the Gàidhealtachd was the types of resources available in the immediate environment, particularly wood:

> The variations in the three main types of old Highland cottages can indeed be largely traced to what local supplies of materials were available and to the presence or absence of shelter... The traditional type of house in the more wooded and more sheltered districts of the Eastern and Central Highlands is entirely different and the old people took full advantage of such conditions to build higher houses with steeper roofs to carry off the rain.[38]

Wood used in the construction of the roof was very valuable, particularly in the less wooded areas where people were largely dependent upon driftwood. An anecdote from the Clearances, for example, states that the women from Glenconon, Uig, Skye, carried the beams on their backs when they were cleared to another area.[39]

The availability of wood had a large impact on all aspects of life in the old Highlands. Wood was a vital resource keenly sought after, as the proverb expresses: *'Chan eil maide càm no dìreach nach fhaigh feum an Ròdhag*

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35 Richard Sharpe 1995, p. 155 (§II 3).
36 Alexander Forbes 1874, p. 77.
37 Osgood MacKenzie 1949, p. 152. For explanation of the construction of wooden fences and wattles in an Irish context, see Fergus Kelly 1997, pp. 374-7.
38 I. F. Grant 1961, pp. 142, 146-7.
39 Dr. Margaret Bennett, personal communication.

[There's not a crooked or straight stick that won't be of some use in Roag].'[40] The availability of wood influenced the design and creation of all sorts of household items, from tools to furniture.[41] In fact, so important were wood-working skills in Lochaber that an item called the *stoc suiridheiche* [the wooer's block], was kept handy for fathers to test young men's skills who came seeking young women in marriage.[42] This tradition also appeared in Perthshire:

> The fir-roots were extremely difficult to cut up, and at least one householder in Glenlyon was wont to keep the *creamhchdan giuthais* [block of fir-wood] that promised to be most troublesome and ask the wooers that came after his daughters to cut it up. The young men of course anxious to show off made heroic efforts to disrupt the fir-root and so saved the goodman much labour.[43]

One of the more ingenious uses of wood resources was the 'fir candle', 'splinters of resinous fir-wood, or better still, knots from pine-trees buried in peat mosses',[44] called *spiolagan* in Perthshire.[45] As they have even been found by archaeologists in crannogs, they have been lighting up Scottish dwellings for a very long time indeed.[46] The pieces of fir needed to be well-dried and this was sometimes done by sticking them into the links of the *slabhraidh* [the chain on which the cauldron hung]. This inserting of fir wood into the *slabhraidh* was also used to keep the fairies at bay, as will be discussed below.

The people of Glenmoriston were distinguished for their use of fir candles and the area was referred to with the saying: *'Gleann mìn Moireasdan, far nach ith na coin na coinnlean* [Smooth Glenmoriston, where the dogs don't eat the candles]' i.e., since they are not made of tallow.[47]

Martin Martin has an interesting comment to make about wood used symbolically in the agreement of lease:

> When the Proprietor gives a Farm to his Tenant, whether for one or more Years, it is customary to give the Tenant a Stick of Wood, and some Straw in his hand: this is immediately return'd by the Tenant to his Master, and then both Parties

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40 *NGP*, p. 125.
41 See I. F. Grant 1961, pp. 6-7, 113, 168-173 for discussion.
42 *NGP*, p. 391.
43 NLS MS 436 (Rev. Charles M. Robertson), p. 38b.
44 I. F. Grant 1961, p. 184. See also *CG* VI, pp. 66-7, 83.
45 NLS MS 436, *ibid.*
46 Dixon and Andrian 1996, p. 7.
47 *Celtic Monthly* XVIII, p. 34. Also in Rev. A. Sinclair 1887, p. 13; *CG* VI, p. 83.

> are as much oblig'd to perform their respective Conditions, as if they had sign'd a Lease or any other Deed.[48]

This may be derived from the set of procedures described in Old Irish Law for asserting the right to claim a piece of property: 'To demonstrate his ownership he is required to spend the night on the property, to kindle a fire, and to tend his animals.'[49] Just the kindling of fire by itself was considered an act of asserting ownership.[50] The survival of what seems to be a similar folk tradition is further elaborated by J. G. Campbell:

> A *Sop seilbhe*, or "Possession Wisp," was burned on land, of which possession was to be taken at Whitsunday. The wisp was of fodder or heather. The burning of it on the land... ensured possession (*bha e ceangailte aige tuille*).[51]

The *sop seilbhe* seems to have been generalised to transactions of all kinds: 'As soon as the price is agreed on, the seller turns the horse round deiseal, and then puts the halter or mane into the purchaser's hands, together with a wisp or straw or grass, called *sop seilbh.*'.[52]

Weaponry

A motif to be found in Gaelic heroic tales is that of the hero plucking a tree out of the ground and using it as a weapon.[53] This emphasises the brute strength and size of the hero:

> Oscar, finding himself left alone, went out to where the combatants were, and being destitute of any other weapon, lifted a beam, or big log of wood...[54]

This image can also be found in poetry, as in this fragment which also makes explicit use of tree symbolism in describing the warriors:

> *Ghluais Treunmor air thùs nam fear*
> *Mar dharach àrd nan gleann*
> *Sheas Rìgh na h-Alba ri shleagh*
> *Mar bheum-slèibhe 'teachd bho'n ghleann*
> *A spionnadh leis gach craobh agus creag...*[55]

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48 Martin Martin 1716, p. 125.
49 Fergus Kelly 1988, p. 187.
50 D. A. Binchy 1971, p. 165, note 74.
51 John G. Campbell 1902, p. 272.
52 John Ramsay 1888, p. 450.
53 Stith Thompson motifs F614.2, F621. Note the Irish parallel in Alan Bruford 1969, p. 186.
54 John G. Campbell 1891, p. 30.
55 George Henderson 1898, p. 162, 'Latha nan Trì Righrean'. I have amended *beum-sleàgh* in the original text to *beum-slèibhe*, which makes more sense.

'Big-strong' moved in front of the men
Like the tall oak of the glens
The King of Scotland stood with his spear
Like a spate coming from the glen
Ripping up every tree and craig...

Some of the tales describe shafts or spears which were very crudely fashioned:

> This was when [the Fianna] got the arms; they had before but *Tunnachan*, they were sticks with sharp ends made on them, and these ends burned and hardened in the fire. They used to throw them from them, and they could aim exceedingly [well] with them, and they could drive them through a man. They used to have a bundle with them on their shoulders, and a bundle in their oxters...[56]

Another of the 'primitive' tree weapons wielded by the hero was the *caman* [shinty stick], sometimes described as being cut right on the spot:

> "Thou shalt have a shinny", said Gealbhan Greadhna. Conall gave a look round about, and he saw a crooked stick of elder growing in the face of a bank. He gave a leap thither and plucked it out by the root, and he sliced it with his sword and made a shinny out of it.[57]

It was the tradition to have a game of *camanachd* on the morning after Hogmanay:

Ged is i 'nochd oidhche Challainn...
Mo chaman tha 'n coill a' bharraich
'S cha tèid a ghearradh le tuaigh aisd'...[58]

Although tonight is Hogmanay...
My caman is in the leafy forest
And it won't be cut out of it with an axe...

Bows and arrows were also common instruments of war in the Highlands into the 17th century, when firearms made them obsolete. Trees were specially planted to supply the wood for making bows and arrows:

> ...the present ash trees at Ardlair, and other places hereabouts, are supposed to have sprung from old trees grown long ago on purpose to supply bows...[59]

Weapons were referred to just as often by the type of wood of which they were made as by the name of the type of weapon itself. Sometimes this leads

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[56] *PTWH* vol. 2, p. 533-4, 'Duan na Ceardach'.
[57] *PTWH* vol. 2, p. 392, 'Conall Gulban'.
[58] *NBT*, p. 34, 'An t-Iasgach Geamhraidh'.
[59] John Dixon 1886, p. 112. See also Mark Anderson, p. 147, for the tradition that the yews on Inch Lonaig in Loch Lomond were planted by Robert the Bruce for providing bows.

to ambiguity, and one must use the context to decide whether the weapon referred to is a bow, an arrow, or something else:

Agus fiùbhaidh chaol-earra
Air a falach gu cèir am feòil...[60]

And slender-ended wood
Hidden to its waxy end in flesh... (= arrow)

'Gam bi 'n t-iubhar 'ga rùsgadh ri feum...
'Gam bi 'n t-iubhar mìn fada caol rèidh...[61]

Who'll have the yew being bared for use...
Who'll have the smooth long slender yew... (= long-bow)

Bhiodh an t-iubhar 'ga lùbadh
Mar ri fiùbhaidh 'chinn stòraich...[62]

The yew would be bent (= bow)
With the wood of the jagged head (= arrow)...

This convention of praising of the wood of the weapon continued to be invoked even when the wood was that of the stock of a gun: *'Stoc de'n fhiodh gun mheang* [Stock of flawless wood].'[63] The wood terminology for weapons was so strong in Gaelic poetic conventions that it can even be found in reference to the gun itself: *'An fhiùbhaidh Fhrangach chàincheannach* [The shiny-headed French wood]'.[64] Perhaps in such cases *fiùbhaidh* has been generalised to mean a weapon of any sort. Still, these tree conventions continued to be used for dispraise as well when the poet wanted to satirise his subject, as when Donnchadh Bàn calls MacEoghain's gun *'an cuaille dubh cam* [the dingy, crooked bludgeon].'[65]

With this artillery of weapons, so often couched in tree and wooden terminology, it is no wonder that this poet compares the leaves of the trees to the array of weapons of Coinneach Òg:

'S lìonmhor duilleag th' air an draigheann
Eadar Bealltainn agus Samhainn
'S lìonmhoir' na sin sgiath is claidheamh

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[60] *BG*, l. 5426-7, 'Iorram na Truaighe'.
[61] *OIL*, l. 461; 467, 'Iorram do Mhac Gille Eathain Dhubhaird'.
[62] *OIL*, l. 1194-5, 'Òran do Aonghas Òg Morair Ghlinne Garaidh'.
[63] *ODB*, l. 2799, 'Moladh Beinn Dobhrain'.
[64] *MD*, l. 379, 'Thug mi 'n ionnsaigh Bhearraideach'.
[65] *ODB*, l. 2485, 'Cumha Choire a' Cheathaich'.

'N gualainn Choinnich Òig am Brathainn...[66]

The thorn is full of leaves
Between May Day and Halloween
But more plentiful are shield and sword
By the shoulder of Coinneach Òg of Brahan.

Similarly, images of the abundance of nature, beginning with a tree image, are used to highlight the multitude of arms hanging in the court of Dòmhnall Gorm:

Cha liutha dris air an droigheann
No sguab choirce air achadh foghair
No sop seann todhair air taobh taighe
Na an cùirt Dhòmhnaill, sgiath is claidheamh
Clogaide gormdheas is balg shaighead
Bogha iùbhrach is tuagh chatha...[67]

There are not more thorns on the thorntree
Or sheafs of oats in a harvest field
Or wisps in the old thatch on the house
Than shield and sword are in Domhnall' court,
Shiny helmet and quiver
Yew-bow and war-axe...

Vessels of the Sea

Marine navigation has always been a crucial means of travel around Ireland and Britain. Some of the earliest vessels are no more than hollowed out log canoes and Classical sources mention the distinctive Celtic coracles, but larger ships were being built by the time of Columba. Adomnán's brief mention of the expedition to retrieve wood from the nearby mainland tells us that woodworkers on Iona were actively involved in house and ship building, and that, already by this time, they had to go to the mainland to get the appropriate wood:

> ...pine trees and oaks had been felled and dragged overland. Some were to be used in the making of a longship, and besides ships' timbers there were also beams for a great house to be brought here to Iona... oak trees were being towed by a group of twelve curraghs from the mouth of the River Shiel to be used in repairs to the monastery.[68]

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66 Angus Matheson 1951, p. 320, 'Tàladh Choinnich Òig'.

67 *BG*, l. 6558-6563, 'Tàladh Dhòmhnaill Ghuirm'. I have followed Ronald Black's advice in interpreting *seann todhair air taobh taighe* as referring to the practice of stripping the previous year's thatching from the roof and using it as fertiliser in the fields.

68 Richard Sharpe 1995, §II.45.

There is a brief allusion to boat building in a tale from Griomasaigh, in which three sons of a king are pressed into service by their father to making a boat in which to sail to meet the challenge of a rival king. The oldest son begins the task:

> *'Thèid mise do'n choillidh,' ars' esan, 'agus sònraichidh mi a-mach fiodh agus tha còir againn ann am bliadhna gum biodh long deiseil leis a siùbhaileamaid gu Rìgheachd na h-Àirde Deas.'*
> *Dh'aontaich a dhithis bhràithrean agus athair leis. Air an latha màireach dh'fhalbh e do'n choillidh. Chuir e comharr' air mòran chraobhan de dh'fhiodh freagarrach...*[69]
>
> 'I will go to the forest,' he said, 'and I will pick out the wood and we ought to be able, within a year, to have a boat ready in which we can travel to the Kingdom of the South.'
> His two brothers and father agreed with him. The next day he went to the forest. He marked out many trees of the appropriate wood...

Like weapons, the boat was often referred to not by words for 'boat' itself, but by the kind of wood of which it was made: *'Dia 'na stiùir air an darach* [God is the steer for the oak (ship)].'[70]

Many of the types of wood used for boat-building were in fact the noble woods, and the poets seem to delight in naming the kinds of wood going into the making of the boats:

> *Fhad 's a mhaireadh bìth 'na darach*
> *No buill chaola ri crainn gheala*
> *No giuthas os cionn na mara*
> *Le siaban 's le tràghadh mara...*[71]
>
> While her oak's caulking lasted
> Or her slender ropes fastened to white masts
> Or her pine above the water
> in the seaspray and the sea ebb...

The quality of the wood of the ship is sometimes praised with the same conventions of the Gaelic Panegyric Code as discussed in Chapter One. The poet is doing in a sense what he does for his human subjects of praise, that is, legitimising them by giving them honourable pedigrees and qualities. This can be clearly seen in a number of examples, such as the following, in which the character of the wood is described, as well as its source:

> *Fiodh le bìgh, 's nach d'inndrig carraig*

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69 Pàdruig Moireasdan 1977, p. 9.
70 *BG*, l. 5006, 'Iorram do Bhàta Mhic Dhòmhnaill', Iain Lom.
71 *HF* i, l. 564-7.

A craobhan dìreach gun mhìr leamh air
A dh'fhàs, 's a chinn, ri'r linn 's an Tom Bealluidh.[72]

Wood with resin into which no rock has ever intruded
Her timber straight, without any displeasing wood
Which has grown and matured in Tombealluidh in our time.

'S chuir sinn a-mach ràimh chaol bhasgant
Dhaite, mhìne
De'n ghiuthas a bhuain Mac Bharrais
An Eilean Fhìonain...[73]

And we put out slender melody-making oars
(that were) well-coloured and smooth
From the pine that MacBharrais felled
In Eilean Fhìonain...

In the next following, the noble pine of the boat is named and described in the same way as a human subject is praised, noting its strength, resilience and quality:

Rinn sinn crann dhi 'chumadh de'n ghiuthas nach lùb
'S e bho bhun gu bharr gu fallain, làidir, ùr[74]

We made a mast for her fashioned from the pine which doesn't bend
Which was strong, healthy, pure from top to bottom

In a number of tales and poems,[75] the ship of the heroes is called (either as the name of the boat or as a term for the kind of ship) *Iùbhrach* [an object or place of yew]. As it would have been impractical to build boats from yew on account of the scarcity of the wood and its priority for other purposes, this image is more mythical than literal, invoking the noble and sacred properties of the yew. The term *Iùbhrach* appears in early Irish literature[76] and is probably a forerunner of the fantastic images of magical ships of silver masts and wells of wine which appear in Scottish Gaelic waulking songs.[77]

This term is used by Murchadh MacCoinnich when he praises his beloved boat:

Iùbhrach shocrach a' chuain

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[72] Rev. A. Sinclair 1887, p. 97, 'Beannachadh Bàird do'n Luing', by Archibald Grant (b. 1785).
[73] Derick Thomson 1996, 'Birlinn Cloinn Raghnaill', l. 2008-11.
[74] *NBT*, p. 210, 'Òran a' *Phrimrose*', Donald MacKechnie.
[75] Such as in 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill', §3; William J. Watson 1929, p. 81, 'Gaisgeach na Sgéithe Deirge'; John Dewar 1964, pp. 155-6, a localised variation of 'Teanntachd Mhór na Féinne'; etc.
[76] See the entry for *ibrach* in *RIA*.
[77] *HF* iii, p. 32. Thanks to Professor William Gillies for this perspective on *iùbhrach*.

Dh'an cliù toiseach dol suas
Bhiodh giuthas dosrach nam buadh fo sheòl[78]

Steady yew-boat of the ocean
Famed for being first going windward
Her branching magical pine would be under sail...

With the numbers of the conventions shared between the praise of human subjects and the praise of boats — of which many sea-bound Gaels were exceedingly fond — it may perhaps not be surprising that a number of songs exploit the tree terminology common to both human and ship and blur the distinctions between the two. 'Murdoch Mòr MacKenzie... being urged upon by some friends to marry a second time, he composed the following song making a ship a comparison between his late and future spouse':

Is garbh a-nochd an oidhch' ri m' thaobh
a chailin òg nach stiùir thu i...
an iùbhrach bhuaidheach ghàirdeil chuimir
curach suairc' o'n bhuinne mhear
cobhar criosgheal 'na crann duilleach...[79]

The night is rough at my side
O young maid, will you not steer her?...
The magical glad shapely yew-ship
gentle coracle from the vigorous rapid
skin-white foam in her leafy mast...

It may be that the term *buinne mhear* is a pun, meaning either 'vigourous rapid' or 'buxom plant', highlighting the literary potential in the tree-human parallelism of this treasury of poetic symbolism.

Patrick Sims-Williams explains how the exploitation of metaphor not only gives the oral traditions of the world clever riddles but also plot devices in oral narrative, such as the 'watchman device'. One of the kennings for a ship in both Germanic and Celtic tradition was the 'horse of the ocean',[80] and this, with the tree grafted on, appears in Gaelic folktales:

> One day, then, they saw coming on the sea before them (*mu'n comhair*) from the mainland a speck (*dùradan*), and when it came near they compared it to a horse with a tree standing on its back, but when it came to the shore it was a boat made of wicker-work covered with hides...[81]

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[78] *BG*, l. 5818-20.
[79] William Matheson 1965, p. 178; *GC*, pp. 154-5.
[80] Patrick Sims-Williams 1977-8, p. 113.
[81] John G. Campbell 1895, p. 91.

Also common in 'riddling' imagery of oral narrative is the image of the ocean fleet as a forest. This also appears in Gaelic tale:

Nuair a thill e, 'Tha mi faicinn,' ars e fhèin, 'coltas coille mhòr romhainn anns a' chuan.'
Thuirt Mànus nach robh rathad air coille a bhith ann...
'Tha,' ars esan, 'muir-tèachd an t-saoghail uile gu lèir romhainn an siud, agus na bàtaichean a chaidh innte bho chionn fada...'[82]

When he returned he said, 'I see what seems to be a huge forest before us in the ocean.'
Manus said that there was no way that a forest could be there...
He said, 'The glutenous sea of the entire world is out there before us, and the boats that went into it a long time ago...'

This image also appears in songs, such as in this visionary poem describing the return of the Gaelic royalty (symbolised as lions) to Scotland to gather their followers and avenge the wrongs of Culloden:

Chunnaic mi 'n fhairge mar choill'
Le crannaibh loingeis làn àrd...
Thàinig an treas leoghan diubh
O'n choill', 's o ghàradh nam bàrc...[83]

I saw the ocean like a forest
With the masts of a tall, full fleet...
The third lion of them came
From the forest and from the garden of boats

As with weapons, the convention of referring to ships in tree terminology was so strong that it continued to be used even when the ship in question was modern. Màiri Mhòr nan Òran praises a luxurious barge in traditional style using the term *iùbhrach*:

Cha chuir tuinn le 'n ùinich
Air an iùbhraich maille...[84]

The waves with their contention will not
Put any hindrance on the yew-boat...

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[82] K. C. Craig 1944, p. 10. K. C. Craig gives the word *muir-tèachd* as *muir-tiachd*, no doubt reflecting the breaking of the long e vowel. While this term can mean jelly-fish, it is clear from the context that the term refers to the quality of the ocean, and the adjective *tèachd* appears in early Irish navigation tales to describe the sea. The term *muirteachd* appears in Dwellys meaning 'unnavigable sea'.
[83] *S*, pp. 289-92, 'Dàn le Eachann MacLeòid'.
[84] Màiri Nic-a-Phearsoin, p. 108, 'Òran a' 'Chlaidheimh Mhóir' '.

Selection of wood for use

There were a number of criteria which guided people in their selection of wood for use, when they took it and how. Some of this we might think of as 'practical' knowledge, but other sorts of considerations came into play as well, such as religious belief and tradition, depending on the use and the context.

As I have already discussed above, it is clear that the crannog builders were well aware of the kinds of wood which were most appropriate for various pieces of the crannog: 'Surviving structural remains include the original alder posts of the supporting platform, floor timbers and hazel hurdles forming walls and partitions...'.[85]

There are variations of a proverb in Gaelic that give advice about the criterion for the selection of wood. Some of them, such as the following from Duncan Campbells's collection, describe the ecological conditions conducive to the growth of native trees and where one should go to find them.[86]

Seileach nan allt
'S calltainn nan creag
Feàrna an lòin
'S beithe nan eas;
Uinnsean an dubhair
'S darach na grèine
Leamhan a' bhruthaich
'S iubhar an lèana.[87]

The willow of the streams
And the hazel of the craigs
The alder of the bogs
And the birch of the waterfalls;
The ash of the shade
And the oak of the sun
The elm of the slope
And the yew of the meadow.

Mr. Ronald Black has pointed out to me that directing a person to the yew of the meadow steers him away from the yew of the graveyard. Carmichael's version of this proverb[88] carries the same descriptions except that he prefixes the verb *tagh* [choose] to each tree type and he describes the yew as *iubhar na*

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85 Dixon and Andrian 1996, p. 7.

86 A brief discussion of this can be found in Raghnall MacilleDhuibh, 26.4.96, 'Quern-Dust Calendar', *West Highland Free Press*.

87 Duncan Campbell 1978, no. 797.

88 *CG* IV, p. 102.

leuma [the yew of springiness].[89] Although this association of a quality with a tree does not follow the pattern of environmental situation given for other trees, the elasticity of the yew is an important quality for a number of uses for the yew, including bows.

Nicolson's version[90] is the most concise but only lists the first 5 trees. It also differs from the above in giving *uinnsean an deisir* [ash of the south-facing slope] and giving the alternative *beithe a' chnuic* [birch of the knoll]. The most significant characteristic of the ash is, in fact, its tremendous thirst,[91] and hence the description in the previous two proverbs is more appropriate. The birch is a highly resilient tree, and has in fact adapted to the various conditions of Scotland by evolving into different sub-species accordingly.[92]

The choice of wood for particular purposes, especially ritual use, was also limited according to traditional beliefs, and will be discussed in detail below.

Alder is referred to more than any other wood in Gaelic lore, particularly proverbs, on account of it being of little value. Nevertheless, people had to make do with what was available to them: *'Is olc a' chliath fheàrna nach toir bliadhna 's an ursainn* [It's a poor alder hurdle that won't last a year in the doorway]'; *'Is olc an cabar feàrna nach dean ràidhl' air an taigh* [It's a poor alder post that won't make a rafter for the house].'[93]

Alder was also a last resort for fuel: *'Is diù teine feàrna ùr* [Green alder is the worst of fuels].'[94] There is, in fact, a story from Lismore about a confrontation between St. Columba and St. Moluag which left Lismore bereft of any other wood for the purpose, but St. Moluag tried to make the best of it:

> Tradition declares that St. Columba took his beating badly and actually cursed Moluag...
>
> Columba: *'Feàrna mar chonnadh duibh!'* [May you have alder for fuel!]
> Moluag: *'Gabhail mar a choinneal dà!'* [May it kindle like the candle!]
>
> ...It has been held that alder burns in Lismore better than any where else, and thus fulfils the expectations of the saint. But probably the greatest interest in this story arises from the fact that there is still to-day, almost 1400 years after

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89 According to Father Alan MacDonald 1958, *leumach* can also mean that it is wood that kindles easily.
90 *NGP*, p. 386.
91 L. J. F. Brimble 1948, p. 323; Hugh Fife 1994, p. 164.
92 L. J. F. Brimble 1948, p. 232; Hugh Fife 1994, p. 125-132.
93 *NGP*, p. 316. The word *ràidhle* is probably just a borrowing of the English 'rail', and the form *ráil* can be found in Dinneen's Irish Dictionary meaning 'a rail'. On the other hand, it may be that an old term for the oak, *rail*, has had an influence on this word or encouraged the borrowing of it.
94 *NGP*, p. 253.

> the landing of Moluag in Lismore, a small copse of alder trees at the bay — Port Moluaig — where it is said he first stepped ashore.[95]

Oak was a preferred wood for fuel, and the proverbial expression *'cho dearg ri gual an daraich* [as red as oak charcoal]' can be found in song and story.[96] The suitability of ash and hazel for immediate use in the fire even when freshly cut was referred to in the proverb:

> *Gabhaidh an t-uinnseann as an allt*
> *Is an calltainn as a' phreas.*[97]
>
> Ash straight from the stream will burn
> And the hazel from the thicket.

Humankind has had millennia to observe and deduce the various forces in nature and their influences on the elements. It was realised long ago that the state of the moon determined the state of the tides and the moon was believed ultimately to have a strong influence on fluids of all sorts, including the sap in wood. This belief was mentioned by Pliny, who reports: 'Some of the most recent writers... recommend that fruits and grapes should be picked early for the purpose of storage, when the moon is waning...'.[98] Even Papal authority had to bow to the practical importance of 'astrological' lore, for Saint Augustine confirms the truth of solar and lunar effects on nature, but divests these bodies of divine qualities: 'We see that the seasons of the year change with the approach and the receding of the sun. And with the waxing and waning of the moon we see certain kinds of things grow and shrink, such as sea urchins and oysters, and the marvellous tides of the ocean.'[99]

The sowing and reaping of plants was carefully regulated by the phase of the moon, although there is not always consistent agreement on which phase is most propitious for each activity. The first report about this we have in a Gaelic context is from Martin Martin, who wrote: 'They fell their timber, and cut their Rushes in time of the Decrease.'[100] Lachlann Shaw wrote: 'They narrowly observe the changes of the Moon, and will not fell wood, cut turf or fuel, or thatch for houses... but at certain periods of the revolution of that

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95 Iain Carmichael, p. 39.
96 See for example 'Duan na Ceardach' in *FFSU*, p. 30 and *PTWH* vol. 2, p. 523.
97 *GNP*, p. 47.
98 Book XV.62.
99 W. M. Green 1963, pp. 156-7.
100 Martin Martin 1716, p. 175.

planet...'.[101] Dr. Johnson observes, noting a parallel from English folklore, 'They expect better crops of grain, by sowing their seed in the moon's increase.'[102] J. G. Campbell gives us more specific information:

> Withies or slender twigs (*caol*) intended for creels and baskets were cut only in the wane [of the moon]. Twigs cut in the increase proved brittle. Trees cut in the increase were believed to bud again, but not those cut in the wane.[103]

Even more detail, in Gaelic, was given by an old man named Robertson in Eigg to Alexander Carmichael, and contradicts the previous information by suggesting that the waxing moon was better for cutting wood:

> *Cha mhò a bhuaineadh iad caol cuill no caol seilich a chon chliabh no chraoileag no craobh ghiuthais chon daraich ann an earra-dhubh na gealaiche. Tha brìgh an fhiodha a' dol do'n fhreumh agus am fiodh a' fàs bruanach brisg, gun bhladh gun mhath. Bha na seann daoine ris a h-uile seo ri lìonadh no ri àirde na gealaiche.*[104]
>
> Neither would they cut withes of hazel or willow for creels or baskets, nor (would they cut) Scots pine (to make) a boat during the wane of the moon. The sap of the wood goes down into the root, and the wood becomes brittle and crumbly, without pith or worth. The old people did all of these things during the waxing or full moon.

Felling and exploitation of woods

Although there is a reference to a lost set of 'Laws of MacAlpine',[105] no evidence survives as to what they were and we have scant evidence of what formal legal system existed in Scotland[106] regarding resource management before feudal laws and institutions were established. There can be little doubt that Irish law must have been an important influence and the appearance of the unique Scottish term *giús* in the Law Tracts suggests that Scotland may have been taken into consideration in the formation of the Irish Laws.[107] Although research regarding legal institutions and Celtic Law in Scotland is well beyond the scope of this thesis, it will be useful for the context of the

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101 Lachlan Shaw 1882 vol. 3, pp. 154-5.

102 Samuel Johnson and James Boswell 1996, p. 94.

103 John G. Campbell 1902, p. 306. See also John Dixon 1886, p. 161.

104 *CG* III, p. 278. Note the use of the term *darach* to mean 'boat', even though it is made of pine wood.

105 Michael Lynch 1992, p. 42, p. 453, note 16.

106 Fergus Kelly 1976b, p. 112, mentions Irish law being extended into Scotland after Dál Riadic settlement and suggests that the inclusion of *giús* in the tree list may date from this period. For some issues in early Scottish law, see W. D. H. Sellar 1989, *passim*.

107 Fergus Kelly 1976b, p. 108.

following discussion to begin with a brief examination of some of the aspects of Irish Law regarding trees.[108]

The earliest information dealing with the exploitation of wood occurs in a poem which appears to date from no later than the seventh century.[109] This poem is not a work of literature, but a set of legal rules concerning relations between neighbouring landholders and what the fines are for violations of various kinds to the property of one's neighbour. Among other regulations, a *rí* is expected to know 'the [fines for the] theft of tree-fruit'.

This tract lists the fines to be exacted for the removal or destruction of a neighbour's tree. The tract first mentions that the 'hospitallers of the forest', meaning the fruit-bearing trees, must not be destroyed at all. The 'ivied hazel' is then mentioned explicitly, although no others appear (Binchy thinks that it seems out of place). This confirms the importance of tree-fruit in the diet and the concern that these trees endure so that their fruits would be available.

The *fidnemed* [sacred wooded place/object] is also mentioned as one that must not be destroyed, 'a danger from which there is no escape'. The naming of the above is consistent with one of the Old Irish triads: *Trí mairb direnaiter beoaib: aball, coll, fidnemed* [three dead things paid for by living things: apple tree, hazel tree and sacred tree]. This seems to suggest that these trees carry a penalty of death for which there is no other restitution. The destruction of one of the noble trees must be paid for by three cows, one of the commoners of the forest by a single cow.

The poem also notes that anyone has the right to obtain enough fire-wood to cook the food of a single cauldron and a handful of ripe nuts (lines 45-8). According to one text exploitation rights also included a 'quick dip of a fishing net in a stream, collecting enough wood to cook a meal, cutting rods for a bier, collecting hazel nuts, etc.'[110] There is some ambiguity regarding the rights to hunt and trap on private property,[111] but there would seem to be little restriction placed on the exploitation of resources found in *dírann* [the unhumanised wilderness].[112]

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108 The most recent summary of these laws can be found in Liam Breatnach 1996, §41.
109 D. A. Binchy 1971, p. 152.
110 Fergus Kelly 1988, p. 106; 1997, pp. 388-9. See also D. A. Binchy 1971, p. 162, note 50.
111 Kelly, *ibid.*
112 Fergus Kelly 1988, p. 108.

While there is evidence for the existence of a Gaelic law system in Scotland, especially in the realm of the Lordship of the Isles, it is uncertain to what extent it followed the Irish model. Much more research needs to be done to determine the nature of Gaelic legal institutions before we can draw many conclusions about the application of Irish Law in Scottish Gaeldom. Some of the parallels to these laws that continued in Gaelic custom, however, are worth noting.

There is evidence that tenants in the Gàidhealtachd had the basic right to gather as much wood as they needed to maintain their buildings and provide basic living requirements and this practice has the appearance of great antiquity.[113] At least in some parts of the Highlands, people carried this wood home with them when returning from the shielings, as in this account from Glenlyon:

> *An uair bhiodh iad a' pilltinn dhachaidh bheireadh iad leotha, na h-uile aon diubh, luchd eich de ghiuthas Coille Dhubh Raithneach air son nan tighean aca, no air son airneis a dhèanamh.*[114]
>
> When they would be returning homewards, they would take with them, every one of them, a horse-load of pine of the Black Wood of Rannoch for their houses, or so that they could make furniture.

The famous Scottish Gaelic proverb *'Breac a linne, slat a coille is fiadh a fireach — mèirle nach do ghabh duine riamh nàir' aisde* [A trout from a water, a stick from a wood and a deer from a moor — thefts which no one was ever ashamed of]'[115] seems to be a defence of this long-standing practice against the tighter regulations of later eras. This 'inherited wisdom' may seem to us today to be a rather *laissez-faire* attitude about resource management in the old Highlands, but it existed in very different demographic and economic circumstances.

The first evidence of Foresters introduced with feudalism is a record for the year 1120, concerning the Keeper of the Forest and Moor of Cardenenie (Cardenenden), Kinghorn, Fife.[116] Royal forests were established all over Scotland, particularly in the geographical Lowlands near royal seats, not only

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113 See in particular Mark Anderson 1967, pp. 110, 120, 131, 157, 434-7, 485, 494-5; Hugh Cheape 1993, p. 58; Charles Withers 1988, p. 78.

114 Alastair Stiubhart 1911, p. 57. This corresponds closely to information recorded in 1734 given in Mark Anderson 1967, pp. 494-5.

115 *NGP*, p. 76. See also Rev. A. Stewart 1928, p. 248.

116 Mark Anderson 1967, p. 137.

for royal sport and hunting, but also for the general provision of food and game for those doing the King's business. Royal forests were therefore distributed at regular intervals over the countryside and put under the charge of an official, who was often a baron.[117]

Forest Laws were eventually officially written, although they only survive in documents from later periods, the earliest being the Bute MS of the late fourteenth century.[118] Anderson gives eighteen early Forest Laws. The first eleven seem to be older than the last seven and probably existed by the time of the first forest grant in 1147.[119] The first eleven all restrict people and their domestic animals from ranging into the forest, especially to prevent people from hunting and animals from grazing. The actual wood resources of the forest are only explicitly mentioned in law 13. Even under the Scottish feudal system, however, 'Pasture land and [public, non-Royal Forest] woodlands were enjoyed in common, each villager having a right to graze so many animals and a right to fuel from the woodland or in the form of peat.'[120]

The first surviving occurrence of the term 'Forester' in Gaelic is in a poem in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*. The historical notes provided by Watson date the poem to sometime before 1527.[121] 'Forester' is obviously a non-Gaelic loan word, which, under natural phonetic adaptation, appears as *Forsair* in Gaelic.

There is plenty of evidence for the conflict between common practice amongst the folk of the country and the 'king's men' attempting to police the officially designated forests. Common woodlands continually retreated due to the advances of agriculture,[122] emboldening people to resort to the resources of the Royal Forests. There are numerous examples of people fined for breaking the Forest Laws, as well as complaints that much destruction was being done by those who were never caught and punished for their trespass.

In the account of local characters in Braemar, Michie provides a sketch of Alexander Davidson, a native Gael whose vagabond lifestyle included poaching and who, in echoes of the Gaelic proverb, held that 'there was no

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117 *ibid*, pp. 136-7. See also pp. 90-1 for the definition and usages of the term 'Forester' in English and Scots.

118 The documents are discussed in *ibid*, pp. 149-50, and the laws themselves on pp. 150-7.

119 *ibid*, p. 155.

120 *ibid*, p. 849.

121 *BA*, p. 283. A woman addressed in the poem is the wife of James Campbell of Lawers. She died in 1527.

122 Michael Lynch 1992, pp. 56, 61.

harm in taking a stick out of the wood, if it was not planted, but to help one's self to planted timber was theft'.[123]

There is similarly a tradition that a Duncan Chisholm was caught by estate officials carrying away a stick from the woods of the Chisholm estate in Strathglass in the first half of the nineteenth century and was threatened with eviction. He went to a local tacksman for advice, who composed a poem for him which he was told to recite in the presence of the chief as though he had composed it himself. The poem made the intended impression on the chief, who had him pardoned. Duncan says that the Lowland churls were:

'Gam chur a làraich mo bhothain
'S e air torran bochd lom
Gun àirneis gun earras
Gun fhear ann gun fhonn...

'S e ri gleadhraich is mionnan
Air son bhioran gun suim
Ach ciod a b' urrainn mi dhèanamh
Nuair bha maid' air mo dhruim?...

Na bhur glinn is bhur giùbhsaich
Gheibhte craobh agus fiadh
Gun eagal gun chùram
Gun iomagain gun fhiamh...[124]

Putting me out of the site of my bothy
Which is on a poor barren hillock
Lacking furnishing or wealth
Uninhabited and joyless...

He was screaming and swearing
All because of worthless sticks
But what could I do
When the stick was on my back?...

In your glens and pine-woods
Wood and deer would be had
Free from fear or worry
Free from concern...

The axe was utilised for a very long time for the felling of timber in Scotland, for axe-marks can still be seen on the wood in crannog excavations.[125] There are a number of Gaelic proverbs that refer to the axe or

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[123] John Grant Michie 1872, p. 192.

[124] *The Celtic Monthly* 7 (1899), p. 215. While the text gives *bioran* (nominative singular), one would expect this word to take a genitive form, either *biorain* or *bhioran*. I have chosen *bhioran*.

[125] Dr. Nick Dixon, personal communication.

the act of felling but which are typically used metaphorically, such as *'Chan ann leis a' cheud bhuille a thuiteas a' chraobh* [The tree doesn't fall with the first blow]'[126] or *'Buill' air gach craobh, 's gun chraobh 'ga leagail* [a blow on every tree without felling a single one].'[127]

A great many folktales describe the use of the axe, such as *An Dà Chìobair* [The Two Shepherds], set in Lochaber:

> Callum, when the weather grew cold, took his axe, and felled a large birch tree in the neighbourhood forest, the branches supplied wood for the fire for several days...[128]

However, the most common story employing an axe, to be found all over Gaelic Scotland, is the children's cumulative-tale, called by some *Mionachan Beag is Mionachan Mòr*. The relevant run is as follows:

> *'Tha mi ag iarruidh slat gu gabhail air Minneachan...' 'Chan fhaigh thu mise gus am faigh thu an tuagh a ghearras mi.'... 'Chan fhaigh thu mise gu bràth gus am faigh thu a' chlach fhaobhair...'*[129]
>
> 'I am seeking a stick with which to strike Minneachan...' 'You won't have me until you find an axe that will cut me.'... 'You will never get me until you get a sharpening-stone...'

It is clear from historical sources, such as Adomnán as quoted above, that large amounts of timber were extracted from the woods for use. The practice of floating timber from extraction site to a site of use is described in Latin by a Morayshire man in the first half of the sixteenth century:

> There is, if my memory serves me well, a river of much this kind in Northern Britain (they call it Scotland), the Tay, where the local people throw the trees, which they have cut down in the forest, into the river nearby (for they would not be able to transport them to town very easily otherwise) and then placing themselves upon these trees (they are very much men of the forest) they are wont to ride as if they were on a boat over the rapids and, to the great amazement of the onlookers, sail downstream quite safely.[130]

There is a deep ambiguity about woodlands, to be explored in more detail in Chapter Four. There is evidence that the agricultural community held trees in suspicion, even contempt, in surviving accounts of the difficulty that

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126 *NGP*, p. 117.
127 *NGP*, p. 79.
128 *PTWH* vol. 1, p. 453.
129 Robert MacLagan 1901, p. 158.
130 William Linnard 1981, pp. 77-8.

tree-planting lairds had with their tenantry. 'Tenants often look upon trees with an evil eye as productions in which they have no interest.'[131]

On the other hand, despite the threat that agriculturalists might have perceived in woodland, there is also evidence that they understood that woodland resources could be exploited for the benefit of agricultural endeavours.

> The Arrable land is dunged with the Cattle lying upon it. In some places it is customary to cover it with Branches of wood which are cutt when full of Leaves and continue to ly on the ground till it is plowed up, so that by the time the leaves are fallen off, and pretty much Rotten.[132]

Cultivation

It is worth mentioning that linguistic evidence provides us with clues about tree species available in Ireland and Scotland, especially with regards to the pine. The words *ochtach, giús* and *ailm* for 'pine' have a complex linguistic history.[133] In brief, while there is an obvious pedigree for the name *ochtach,* and *ailm* occurs in early albeit learned sources, *giús,* whose etymology is not known, does not appear until about the ninth century. This suggests that this wood had to be imported from Scotland once it became extinct in Ireland (not earlier than the 9th century),[134] and with the dependence upon the Scottish source came the emergence of the distinctively Scottish name in general usage.

As I have already mentioned, trees, especially fruit trees, were cultivated from very early times, especially in orchards associated with monasteries and royal residences. Indeed, it is likely that the cultivation of trees, especially fruit and nut-producing trees, began in the Neolithic.[135] Ramsay of Ochtertyre records that monastic houses were particularly active in tree planting, but that by his time (1801) few of the original plantations remained, particularly because of the destruction of property during the Reformation.[136] Despite the fear of woods inherited by Roman and Jewish traditions, many Christian

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131 Mark Anderson 1967, p. 485.
132 *ibid*, p. 497. See also p. 89.
133 It should be noted that *ailm* generally refers to the elm in Modern Irish and Scottish Gaelic, but that in Old Irish, *lem* refers to the elm and *ailm* to the pine. The letter A corresponded to *ailm* in the original Ogham kennings, which appears to have meant pine-tree (Damian McManus 1991, p. 38).
134 Fergus Kelly 1976b, pp. 111-3.
135 Mark Anderson 1967, p. 55.
136 *ibid*, p. 242.

monasteries around Europe established themselves in woodlands not only for seclusion, but for the exploitation of forest resources.[137]

The Chronicles of the Frasers mention that Lord Thomas enlarged the Lovat orchard in about 1501,[138] and Nicander Nucius of Corcyra wrote in 1545 of Scotland: 'of cultured and fruit-bearing trees they possess an abundant supply.'[139]

One can find descriptive phrases such as *Ceapach nam peuran* [Keppoch of the pears], in Gaelic verse,[140] and descriptions, or perhaps idealisations, of chieftain's residences which included cultivated trees:

> *'G amharc àros nan luibhean*
> *Far am b' àbhaist duit suidhe*
> *Gheibhte àile nan ubhall 's nam peur...*[141]
>
> Gazing upon the garden
> Where you used to sit
> The scent of apples and pears was smelt...

The traditional song *An t-Oighre Òg* [the young heir], set in Dunvegan, says in praise of his estate, and of him by implication:

> *Tha ùbhlan 'nad ghàradh*
> *Agus peuran a' fàs ann...*
>
> There are apples in your garden
> And pears growing in it...

Martin Martin tells us of the care taken by the tenders of MacDonald's orchard in Skye at the end of the seventeenth century:

> The common Alga, or Sea-Ware, is yearly us'd with Success, to manure the Fruit-Trees in Sir Donald Mack-Donald's Orchard at Armidill: several affirm, that if a Quantity of Sea-Ware be us'd about the Roots of Fruit-Trees, whose Growth is hinder'd by the Sea-Air, this will make them grow and produce Fruit.[142]

John Ramsay of Ochtertyre again gives us important information about agricultural practices in the Gàidhealtachd for which we have little other

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137 Simon Schama 1995, p. 227.
138 James Fraser 1905, p. 122.
139 Mark Anderson 1967, p. 209.
140 For exmple in *GC*, p. 148, 'Òran do Mhac Mhic Raghnaill na Ceapaich', Iain Lom; *T*, p. 169, 'Marbhrann do Dhonull Mac Raoghnuill mhoir, fear Thir-na-dris', Alasdair Camshron Dhoch-an-asaidh.
141 *OIL*, l. 496-7, 'Glacadh Morair Hunndaidh'.
142 Martin Martin 1716, p. 177.

corroboration.[143] Upon the death of James V, Crown lands, and subsequently holdings of the Church and the great barons, were parcelled out and feued in smaller units to a great number of people of lesser station. These people had a great incentive to 'improve' their estates, including the planting of trees protected from cattle. Ramsay notes that those who obtained grants between 1590 and 1645 were particularly adept at the 'development' of their newly acquired estates. Anderson sums up this new burst of arboreal activity noting that '...prior to 1603 a definite fashion of tree-planting had been set in Scotland, probably owing its initiation to certain of the greater nobles and the sovereign and stimulated to some extent by legislation...'.[144]

One of the most notable early Gaelic 'improvers', who fits into the period that Ramsay delineates, was *Donnchadh Dubh a' Churraic*, Sir Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy, who lived from 1583 to 1631:

> In many ways Sir Duncan was ahead of his age. He was a pioneer of afforestation, and made laws requiring all tenants and cottars to set down and plant young trees, oak, ash, and plane, every year in their 'kailyards,' in proportion to the size of their holdings. The saplings were to be supplied by his own gardener in each district... He laid down extensive plantations himself... In order that his woods should be protected a fine of twenty pounds was to be imposed on any one cutting, or in any way destroying, young trees...[145]

By the first half of the eighteenth century we see Highland chieftains bringing seedlings back to Scotland with them from abroad, such as James Menzies, 'old Culdares', who is credited with introducing the larch into Scotland from the Tyrol.[146]

Gaelic reaction to external exploitation of wood resources

I have already discussed in brief the manner in which Gaels made use of their own wood resources. The questions which have yet to be adequately answered are: what did the local Gaels feel about the extraction of wood resources by outside agencies, which consumed it at a much greater rate than the traditional Gaelic community could? What impact could this new style of enterprise have on the Gaelic perception of the relationship between people

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143 Mark Anderson 1967, p. 254.
144 *ibid*, pp. 262-3. See also p. 360.
145 Rev. William Gillies 1938, pp. 140-2. See also Mark Anderson 1967, pp. 261, 337-8, 374-5.
146 Alexander Stewart 1928, p. 97.

and resources? There is anecdotal evidence, from both song and story, about such enterprises all over the Gàidhealtachd.

The first large-scale commercial operation in the Gàidhealtachd seems to be that in Letterewe in 1607 under the direction of Sir George Hay, a graduate of the Scots College at Douay, France and one of the failed Fife adventurers.[147] The smelting used huge amounts of wood in order to smelt the iron ore extracted from nearby mines, exhausting the forest in question. In fact, this caught the attention of the Scottish Parliament, which promptly passed an act outlawing the use of wood in the manufacture of iron as being unnecessarily extravagant and better reserved for other purposes.[148] Hay seems to have had friends in high places, however, for in 1612 another act was passed giving him a monopoly on the manufacture of glass and iron.[149] Unfortunately, we lack information about how the people in the area reacted to the enterprise. It is the case, however, that operations continued in the area until 1671 and that many of the incoming workers stayed on and integrated into the community.

With the opening up of Scotland to the ever-expanding sphere of capitalist enterprise, particularly after the Union of Parliaments, it is no surprise that Scotland's huge stock of wood came to the attention of the British business world. The seventeenth century was a watershed in terms of the assimilation of the Highland nobility into Lowland society, but this did not yet restructure Gaelic society as a whole or bring its economic operation into line with that of Lowland society.[150] While Highland chiefs could profit by being willing channels for the economic and political enterprises of England and Lowland Scotland, this was often at the expense of the rest of the Gaelic community:

> Following upon the pacification of the Highlands, serious inroads began into the quite considerable natural woods of oak, birch and pine for commercial purposes. It is clear that the Highland chiefs regarded this as a sound proposition from their own point of view, and few of them had any regard for the conservation of the ancient forests, or for the needs of the local inhabitants, any more than their opposite numbers in the Lowlands... Any communal interest which the clans may have recognised in the past was soon forgotten.[151]

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147 John Dixon 1886, p. 75; Mark Anderson 1967, p. 312.
148 John Dixon 1886, p. 412 (Scots Acts vol. IV, p. 408b).
149 *ibid*, pp. 80, 412 (Scots Acts October 23, 1612).
150 Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart 1996, *passim*.
151 Mark Anderson 1967, p. 437.

Anecdotal information survived in oral tradition about the operations initiated when Robert Campbell of Glenlyon struck a deal in 1673 with a company of merchants, giving them his fir forests in order to relieve him of the claims of debtors. Duncan Campbell fills out some of the interesting details:

> Yet it was with grief and indignation he saw his woods, the relics of the great Caledonian forest, destroyed by the stranger; and he was glad when Crawford had trespassed on the jointure lands of his mother, to have a chance to stop him in the name of the law, as follows:— "... and anent her hurts and prejudices done to her by Captain John Crawford, by cutting and destroying the ground, cornes, and grass pertaining to her..."[152]

Feelings against the incursions of the merchants and their employees must have run high amongst these Glenlyon folk in general, for we soon see them getting involved in the action and composing songs in commemoration of the events:

> The "civil interruption" of the legal instrument was not quick enough in its operation to please the Glenlyon people. The dam was broken, and the sawmill set on fire one fine summer evening, and I have heard in boyhood a song in which it was commemorated:— *"Mar loisg iad na daimh chròcach air bòrd a mhuilinn shàbhaidh"* [How they burned the wide-horned (dragging) oxen on the boards of the saw-mill]...[153]

Folk tradition becomes even more pronounced when a neighbour with the power of the evil-eye is rewarded for wielding it:

> ...under the blasting influence of the evil eye, the machinery got entangled, the saw-wheel broke, and a splinter, striking a workman in the face, deprived him of an eye! It is needless to add, Crawford's mill came to a dead stand, and the countryman got his meal made — thanks to the potent influence of the *Beum-sùl*.[154]

The operations of the York Company in Glenmore in the early 1730's seemed to encounter similar resentment and opposition, as described by Forsyth:

> Great fires sometimes broke out, from accident or malice. Mr Thomas Baylis, one of the York Company, wrote to Sir James Grant, 12th August, 1731, complaining of a fire that had been maliciously raised to the east of Balnagowan, and which

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152 Duncan Campbell 1886, p. 33.

153 *ibid*, p. 34. Note that it is not made clear whether the *daimh* were real oxen or merely machinery. It would appear from the context, and from the next quote, that machinery is being referred to.

154 *ibid*, p. 35.

had been very destructive... It is probably this fire that is referred to in a Gaelic rhyme of the period:

Soraidh slàn do'n t-Searsonach
Chuir teas ri Cùl na coille
'S dh'fhuadaich 'mach na Sasannaich
A dh'iarraidh 'n leasach' Bheurla.

A dh'fhuadaich 'mach na Sasannaich
Thar mullach Tom nam Broilleag
'S a dh'innis dhaibh nam pilleadh iad
Gum millteadh anns an staing iad.[155]

Farewell to the 'sheriff'
Who set fire to Culnacoille
And who drove out the Englishmen
To seek better English [ie., than they can find in a Gaelic-speaking area].

Who drove out the English
Over the top of Tom-nam-broilleag
And who told them that if they would return
That they'd be drowned in the ditch.

Events after Culloden could not have done much to assuage feelings of powerlessness and exploitation. There was a loss of woods due to victorious government soldiers as they also pillaged homes for loose valuable property and committed random acts of destruction.[156] The House of Gask was one of those upon which such vandalism was inflicted:

> "The Auld House" was plundered by Cumberland's soldiers... The woods upon the property suffered very much at this period from the military depredations, large numbers of trees being cut down and sold.[157]

Enormous changes in social organisation and economics were forced in place on the forfeited Highland estates by government commissioners. Such changes were coerced, very rapid, and were brought about by external forces,

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[155] Rev. W. Forsyth 1900, p. 296. The second verse is to be found in Sinton 1898 (Forsyth's MSS passed on to Sinton), p. 256. The original *milleadh* in the last line of the second verse has been emended as *millteadh*, on the advice of Mr. Ronald Black, to make better sense. I have also taken his advice on interpreting this word as meaning 'drown' in this case, as it is used in this sense in some dialects. The term *Searsanach* is given by Alexander MacBain (a native of Badenoch) in his etymological dictionary (MacBain 1911, p. 306) as meaning 'sherrif officer; estate overseer' and being related to the word 'sergeant', having been borrowed from Lallans. Forsyth's translation of this is 'forester', which seems dubious to me. Why a person of any of these offices would have done this is not altogether clear, although it could be that the perpetrator of the arson was merely given this as an honourary title by the poet.

[156] Several examples are given in Mark Anderson 1967, pp. 508-9.

[157] Thomas Hunter 1883, p. 200.

not by virtue of natural developments within Gaeldom itself.[158] It is not therefore surprising that such changes were viewed with suspicion and displeasure by many in the Gaelic community, as is evident in the resentment amongst the Gaels of Western Inverness-shire towards the government agent, Mr. Butter:

> ...Butter, whose policy seems to have been highly unpopular in Lochaber, and not conducive to its tree growing interests. A Gaelic song,[159] composed about the time the estates were restored to the family, laments that the pine wood, one of the glories of the estate, had, under his management, become a tangled desert. There is no doubt a magnificent quantity of pine and other timber had been cut down by the commissioner, for what purpose is not precisely known. The song alluded to contains the following verse. It bewails the disappearance of the pine wood and the scattering of the clan, but hopes that the old order of things, at least as regards the Cameron people, will be resumed when the long-lost chief returns to his paternal home :—
>
> *Dh'fhalbh do ghiùsaich 'na duslach fhàsaich*
> *'S tha do dhaoin' air sgaoil 's gach àite*
> *Aig a' Bhutrach 'gan cuir o àiteach*
> *Nuair thig thu dhachaidh gun cuir thu àird orr'.*[160]
>
> Your pine-wood has become a dusty desert
> And your people are scattered everywhere
> By Butter, putting them out of steadings
> When you come home, you will set them in order.

The demand for Scottish wood continued, and although 'pacification' had stopped the Gaels short of malicious sabotage of deforestation operations, the bards did not relent in their bitter commentary.

> About the end of the [18th] century some important changes took place in Glenmore. Messrs Osbourne and Dodsworth purchased the woods from the Duke of Gordon, and for upwards of twenty years they employed a large staff of men in the cutting and manufacturing of timber... But it was not all contentment. There were some who resented the intrusion of the Sassanach and the destruction of the woods. Their hearts were in the past. One bard marked the changes with biting sarcasm —
>
> *Siud an gleannan rìoghail fallainn*
> *ann am fanadh làn daimh*

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158 This is the conclusion similarly reached by Marianne McLean 1991 in her study of post-Culloden changes in Western Inverness-shire. See especially pp. 40-41, 76-77.

159 This unnamed song, I have discovered, is printed in Marairead Cham'ron 1785, entitled 'Òran molaidh do na Oighreachan a fhuair air ais an cuid fearainn.' The song, with commentary, is also printed in *The Northern Chronicle* April 5, 1882. The song deals with a number of issues, including the 1782 repeal of the 1746 Act for the Abolition and Proscription of the Highland Dress.

160 David Nairne 1891, pp. 207-8. More information about Mr. Butter's actions, and the reactions of Gaels to his policies, can be found in Marianne McLean 1991, Chapter Four.

Mo mhollachd do'n phannail
a chuir thairis a bharrachd.
'N àite an crònan anns an doire
gu faramach mar b'àbhaist
'S e 's beus dhuinn 'nis anns gach badan
Slachdarnais Ghallda.[161]

Yonder is the wholesome royal glen
In which full-grown stags would linger
My curses on the company
Who took away its foliage.
Instead of their belling in the thicket
Noisily, as was usual,
What is usual now, in every thicket,
Is the clamour of foreigners.

It is not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the theme of the injust exploitation of woodland resources becomes the subject of an entire surviving song, rather than a passing allusion in a song (or a fragment of a lost poem). A Morvern song from about 1845 laments the loss of trees and the export of people, due to the same processes:

...Tha 'chùis air fàs glè chunnartach
Gun tèid thu uile 'ad fhàsach...
'S e uachdaran neo-bhunaiteach
A dh'fhàg an tuath gun bhunachas...
Thuirt iad 'tìr nan coille' riut
Bha uair 's e siud a thoilleadh tu
Ged 's lom an-diugh do dhoireachan...[162]

The matter has become very dangerous
That you will be turned into a total desert...
It is a foreign land-lord
That has left the people without a foundation...
They called you 'the land of forests'
There was a time when you deserved that
Although today your groves are few...

The same sense of injustice to human and tree perpetuated by outside forces is expressed in a Morvern song by Gillean Currie, published in 1883. It is clear from the song, and from the analysis in Chapter 2, that the image of the tree and the forest is a metaphor for the indigenous population as well as the woodlands:

'S gun na daoine còir' chur fàilt' ort;
Ged a labhradh tu ris an fhorsair

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161 Rev. W. Forsyth 1900, pp. 188-9. See also Thomas Sinton 1898, p. 256.
162 Iain Thornber 1983, p. 4, 'A Mhorbhairne Ghlas nan Tulaichean'.

Cha tuig e do chonaltradh Gàidhlig
Ach gheibheadh tu aoigheachd a' chalmain
B' fhearr leis thu dh'fhalbh a làthair...
Ach a-nis tha 'chraobh air crìonadh
As na chinn na meanglan àlainn
'S i bho bhun gu barr air seargadh
Gur dearbhte nach cuir i blàth dhith
Chaidh na freumhaichean a spìonadh...[163]

And without goodly people to welcome you;
Even if you spoke with the forester
He won't understand your Gaelic conversation
But you'd get a pigeon's welcome:
He'd prefer you to leave his presence...
But now the tree has decayed
From which the beautiful branches grew
And has withered from top to bottom
It is certain that it won't come into blossom
The roots have been torn out...

The study of social and economic change in the Highlands has been dominated to date by use of 'objective' numerical data, and poetry and oral tradition been dismissed as too 'subjective' or 'impartial'. It is clear from these Gaelic sources that the exploitation of Highland woods by commercial operations was seen as symptomatic of the loss of control of the Gaelic community over its own socio-economic well-being. Although this information is of a very different nature to that of 'pure' economics, it is equally valid, reflecting, as it does, the direct experience and perception of the Gaelic community. It deserves greater attention and respect in the balanced approach to writing the history of the Highlands.

As in Ireland, the profits of the large-scale exploitation of natural resources have not been equally shared amongst the people who see the resources as part of the land to which they belong. Furthermore, agents have actually displaced these inhabitants in order to maximise the income from such operations as the plantation of forests on settled, or farmed, land. Rather than benefiting from a sense of mutual interdependecy between people and land, the Gaelic community has been alienated from its natural environment by being divorced from its benefits and by being unable to participate in its management and exploitation. These issues will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

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[163] *ibid*, p. 87.

Signs of the seasons and festive apparel

There is a tremendous amount of traditional Gaelic lore connected to the weather and the seasons and it should be no surprise that trees appear in quite a lot of this material. The four seasons are described according to their relationship with trees in a riddle:

Thàinig ceathrar a-nall
Gun bhàta, gun long
Fear buidhe, fionn
Fear slatagach, donn
Fear a bhualadh na sùisde
'S fear a rùsgadh nan crann.[164]

A foursome came over
Without a ship
One bright, fair
One brown, full of twigs
One to strike the flail
And one to strip the trees.

Trees, wood and the fruits of trees have been used for decorative and ritual purposes in the celebrations of seasonal festivals the world over and many of the Gaelic festivals incorporate aspects of tree symbolism. On the one hand, people watched nature for the appearance of certain signs, such as the growth of certain kinds of flora, which indicated the change of weather and season, and with it, the change of activities and tasks which were necessary or appropriate to that time of year. The flora could thus come to symbolise the time of year and activities of that time.

On the other hand, the boundary of change between seasons was seen as a liminal time, a time of danger and uncertainty, when a number of boundaries — between dark and light, order and chaos, dead and living — were weak and the human community vulnerable to the capricious forces that threatened the human order.[165] The community tried to defend the physical boundaries across which harm would come by using magical devices and verdure symbols which are 'indicative of vitality and fertility...[and] promote and protect the household's luck and prosperity...'.[166] The frequent choice of tree

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164 John G. Campbell 1902, p. 225.
165 Alwyn and Brinley Rees 1961, pp. 89-94.
166 Particia Lysaght 1993, p. 41.

boughs, branches and leaves for the assertion of vitality suggests again that the primal symbolism of the Tree of Life informs this custom.

> The use of verdure at or near the house is of considerable antiquity. Already in Greek and Roman times branches and little bushes were used as protection against sickness and evil spirits... The aim of the greenery was to fill and strengthen the house and farmyard and the householders with the new Spring strength, and to scare off everything evil and hostile to life and livelihood as well.[167]

It remains likely, although there is some scepticism about this, that the Celtic year was believed to begin at *Samhainn* [Hallowe'en].[168] With the increasing influence of the Roman calendar system, some of the rites and customs became transferred, at least partially, to Hogmanay, but most of the older Gaelic practices managed to hold fast to the previously recognised date.

Being a liminal time, the earth was vulnerable to the mischievous actions of visitors from the Otherworld. One of the most common preventative measures was the placing of sacred woods in and around the house, particularly at domestic boundaries such as the doorway:

> The yew was sacred in the Highlands and was used not only for making bows but for warding off witches, diving events and safeguarding milk. *Iubhar beinne* [juniper] and *caorann*, mountain ash or rowan, were burnt on the doorstep of the byre on the first day of the quarter, on Beltane Day and Hallowmas... A rod of these or some other sacred wood was placed above the lintel.[169]

Trees are losing their leaves when *Samhainn* arrives:

> *Bidh an duilleach dosrach trom*
> *'Greas' gu fonn 'n uair thig Samhainn...*[170]
>
> The foliage will be heavy and leafy
> Rushing to the soil when Halloween comes.

The fruits of the tree — the hazel nut and the apple — were important supplements to the winter diet and nuts in particular were expected to be plentiful on *Samhainn*:

> *B'fhearr leam fhèin na bò laoigh 's gamhnach*
> *'S na bheil de chnothan an dèidh na Samhna...*[171]

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167 *ibid.*
168 Ronald Hutton 1996, Chapters 35-36.
169 *CG* VI, p. 92. Also in *CD*, p. 116.
170 Thomas Sinton 1906, p. 7, ''N Coille Chnò Taobh Loch Lagain'.
171 *Gairm* 114, p. 175, from the MacLagan collection.

> I would prefer, more than a milch cow and stirk
> And all the nuts there are after Hallowe'en...

This festival was in fact characterised by the consumption of apples and nuts, for example, as given in this account by Balquhidder native James Macintyre:

> On which night, also, they rejoiced for the happy termination of the harvest, by eating apples, cracking nuts, etc...[172]

This practice of cracking and eating nuts was literally proverbial, as evidenced in the saying *'Is ann Oidhche Shamhna 'chnagadh tu cnò* [It's on Hallowe'en night you would crack a nut]: One of the favourite Hallowe'en pastimes was burning of nuts.'[173] This practice seem to be more than just casual, and to originate in rituals of divination which are so common on occasions of renewal such as the turning of the year.

Probably the most significant reference to this is the poem by Eachann Bacach upon the death of Sir Lachlann MacLean who died in 1648. He says of Sir Lachlann *'Cha do bhrist thu a' chnò Shamhna...* [You didn't crack the Halloween nut]'.[174] Colm Ó Baoill notes[175] that there are two ways of interpreting this line. First of all, we may note that, as the above proverb relates, the cracking of nuts was a hallmark of Hallowe'en, and therefore the line may mean 'You didn't live long enough to break the traditional Hallowe'en nut.' Alternatively, there is evidence of a Tiree tradition that a person unable to crack a heated hazelnut on Hallowe'en night is destined to die within the year, and the line could therefore signify 'your death was foretold by the uncracked nut'.

Divination using apples and nuts was also employed for somewhat less frightening prospects, that of ascertaining future spouses:[176]

> *cnò Shamhna*, ref. to the custom of cracking (and eating) nuts at Hallowe'en. Also nuts were placed in the fire in pairs to represent a lad and a lass. If they burned quietly side by side, good; if one or both sprang aside, not good.[177]

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172 Ronald Black 1996, p. 50.
173 *NGP*, p. 241.
174 *EB*, l. 147.
175 *ibid*, pp. 174-5.
176 Some more general discussion in Ronald Hutton 1996, p. 380.
177 *EB*, p. 174. From the notes of William J. Watson, Edinburgh University Library MS 204. See also W. G. Stewart 1851, p. 163.

The cracking of nuts for divination has been shown to have been customary throughout all of Britain at one time.[178] Divination with apples is referred to in a song about Hallowe'en:

Cuid eile gheabh ubhal, gun fhios, gun fhios
'S thèid iad gu sgàthan, 'ga ith, 'ga ith
'S chì iad coltas an leannain 'ga spioladh gu h-ealamh
'S 'ga thoirt as an làmhan gu clis, gu clis...[179]

Others get an apple, unknowing,
And they'll go to the mirror to eat it
And they'll see the likeness of their sweetheart snatching at it nimbly
And taking it out of their hands swiftly...

In some parts this fruit played a dominant role in the festival and characterised it:

> On the first of November, it was an ancient Celtic practice to indulge in a sort of feast, which was called *latha meas ubhal*, the day of the apple fruit, because, on that occasion, roasted apples were bruised and mixed in ale, milk, or, by those who could afford it, in wine.[180]

Each quarter-day is supposed, in Gaelic tradition, to indicate the conditions of the new quarter, which in the case of Hallowe'en usually means unpleasant wintry weather and the loss of healthy flora, as the town-loving sister is represented as saying in Rob Donn's poetry:

Nì e tionndadh Oidhche Shamhna
'S bheir an geamhradh 'shàr;
Duille shuidhicht' barr an fhiodha
Dh'fhàs i buidhe-bhàn
'S tha sealladh 'n t-Srath' air call a dath
Le steall de chathadh-làir...[181]

It will change on Halloween
And the winter will bring its trouble;
Foliage fixed on tree tips
Has grown bright-yellow
And the view of Strath has lost its colour
With a burst of snowy ground-drift...

The riddle given at the beginning of this section is an example of how the winter was commonly described in terms of its effects on trees, making them

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178 Ronald Hutton 1996, p. 380.
179 (Anon) *An Gàidheal* 1876, p. 294. See also W. G. Stewart 1851, p. 163.
180 James Logan 1876, vol II, p. 146.
181 Rob Donn 1899, p. 120, Town and Country Life Dialogue.

bare and seemingly lifeless. This image can be found in a number of nature poems, which grew increasingly common after the influence of Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's poetry, itself influenced by the poetry of proto-Romanticism in Scotland,[182] especially after the popular success of Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir's poetry. Dughall Bochanan's song to the winter also displays this imagery:

Cha bhi sgeadach' air coille
No doire nach rùisg e...[183]

No wood will be ornamented
No grove that it won't bare...

Rob Donn also composed a song to the winter with similar bared-trees imagery:

Bidh gach doire dubh uaigneach
'n dùil fuasgladh a bhlàth;
Bithidh an snodhach a' traoghadh
Gus an fhreumh as na shìn e...[184]

Every grove will be dark and forlorn
In expectation of unfurling its blossom;
The sap will be receding
To the root from which it came...

Yule-tide festivals all around the Christian world include the use of fire, as warmth and illumination bring hopeful expectation of better times to come during the dark and cold part of the year.[185]

> In Highland districts each householder bore from the nearest plantation a withered stump, which, placed on a heap of peats, was set on fire and burned, and by this act skaith and death was averted till the return of the anniversary [from *Social Life in Scotland* vol. III].
>
> Until very recent times the charred remains of the log of one year were preserved carefully until the following Yule, when they served to light the new log; their presence in the house being a safeguard against fire.[186]

This is very similar to a comment made by James Macintyre of Balquhidder about December 22, the longest night of the year, which he calls *Latha Fhèill Finnein*: when, 'according to an ancient custom in the

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182 Derick Thomson 1996, p. 84.
183 Dughall Bochanan 1946, p. 49, 'An Geamhradh'.
184 Rob Donn 1899, p. 206, To Winter.
185 See discussion in E. O. James 1961, pp. 292-6; Ronald Hutton 1996, p. 34.
186 M. MacLeod Banks 1941, pp. 217-8.

Highlands, they burned in every house a large stick, or trunk of a tree.'[187] It also echoes remarks made by Logan:

> The fires of the ancient Caledonians were formed of wood; and, at their feasts, a large trunk of an oak tree was reckoned an indispensable part of the entertainment... It was, until lately, customary at festivals to burn a large trunk of a tree, which was termed the trunk of the feast...[188]

There is an account of a darker side to this Yule log, however. In order to avoid Death's visitation during the coming year, people would choose another person in the community, usually a *cailleach*, who would be 'sacrificed' in their place. Thus Death could be sated until next year:

> The reader will please understand, that this good woman only undergoes this process by representation... He went to the wood this night, fetched home the stump of some withered tree, which he regularly constituted the representative of some person of the description we have mentioned, and whose doom was inevitably fixed by the process...[189]

The first night of the year was called, if there was a wind from the west, *Dàir na coille*. The word *dàir* indicates a state of fertility and readiness for fertilisation or impregnation. The expression *dàir na coille* first appears in the *Old Statistical Account* for Kirkmichael parish in Banffshire (1791-3), written by the Rev. Mr. John Grant, who translates it as 'the night of the fecundation of the trees'. It subsequently appears in Armstrong's mid-Perthshire dictionary of 1825, where the Statistical Account is given as the source. It is interesting that this tradition does not appear in Macintyre's seasonal lore. The term *coille* [forest] is bound up in folk etymology with the Gaelic term for Hogmanay which was common on the mainland, *Oidhche Choille* (although variants such as *Oidhche Challainn* and *Oidhche Challaig* are the terms in other dialects): 'from this [*dàir na coille*]... has been derived the name of that night in the Gaelic language.'[190]

This tradition also appears in various sources at later dates, such as *Cuairtear nan Gleann*: *'Dàir na coille — 'se sin, oidhche anns am bheil beatha ùr air a cur anns na craobhan no anns a' choille* [that is, the night in which

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187 Ronald Black 1996, p. 51. See also Ronald Hutton 1996, pp. 38-40 for discussion of wider significance in Britain and Ireland.

188 James Logan 1876, vol. II, pp. 126, 146.

189 W. G. Stewart 1851, p. 166.

190 *OSA* vol. XII, p. 458. All these forms derive from the Latin *calendæ*, and it is interesting that *Oidhche Choille* is also used to mean New Year's Eve in Irish Gaelic (Dinneen, p. 221).

new life is put into the trees or into the forest].'[191] There is also a widespread proverb used to ascertain the prospects for the coming year according to the directions of the wind on Hogmanay:

Gaoth deas, teas is torradh
Gaoth an iar, iasg is bainne
Gaoth tuath, fuachd is gaillionn
Gaoth an ear, meas air crannaibh.[192]

Wind from south (brings) warmth and plenty
Wind from west (brings) fish and milk
Wind from north (brings) cold and gales
Wind from east (brings) fruit on branches.

As unusual as the idea of the 'fertility of the forest' may seem, there are other similar tree connections with the turning of the year (according to the dates of the Roman calendar). Duncan Campbell's proverb collection contains the saying *'Fàs is gnàths is toradh* [growth and custom and fertility]', which he explains thus: 'On New Year's morning, the head of a household brought in a twig of a tree with these characteristics. It must have life, belong to the land as a native growth, and bear fruit in its season.'[193] This seasonal lore of life being restored to the forest again reminds us of the imagery of the eternally self-regenerating Tree of Life.

Another proverb connects wind and trees on Hogmanay: *'Oidhche Challainn, bu mhath cuileann is calltainn a bhith a' bualadh a chèile* [Hogmanay, it would be good for holly and hazel to be striking each other] — A windy night was considered a good sign of the season.'[194] This expression can even be found in songs, such as in this description of windy weather in a waulking song:

Seòladh gu tìr àrd a' mhurain
Far nach cluinntear fuaim na tuinne
Ach fuaim an t-sìobain ris a' mhurain
Fuaim a' challtainn ris a' chuileann
Fuaim na craoibhe ris an duilleag
Fuaim na sìne ris an uinneag...[195]

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191 Norman MacLeod 1910, p. 339, which reprints a number of items from *Cuairtear nan Gleann*, which ran from 1840 to 1843. Also see Rev. W. Forsyth 1900, p. 35. John MacInnes confirms that he has heard this term as referring to the time when the sap begins to flow in the spring, as he understood it.

192 *NGP*, p. 214. This also appears in the *Old Statistical Account* entry for Kirkmichael, Banffshire.

193 Duncan Campbell 1978, no. 462.

194 *NGP*, p. 374.

195 *HF* i, l. 230-5.

Sailing to the tall land of the bent grass
Where the sound of the wave isn't heard
But the sound of the sea spray against grass
Sound of the hazel against the holly
Sound of the tree against the leaf
Sound of the weather against the window...

It is likely that some of the traditions and ritual from the ancient New Year were transferred to Hogmanay (if *Samhainn* may be correctly equated as such) with the increasing influence of the Roman calendar, as some of the same precautionary and divination practices are evident:

> On the first day of the year it was once customary to burn juniper in byres, stables, and house fire-places... The burning of juniper may have been originally for sanitary purposes, but it had also to do with old Church beliefs.[196]

> The house was hung with holly to keep out the fairies, and a boy, whipped with a branch of it, may be assured he will live a year for every drop of blood he loses. This scratching and assurance were bestowed by boys on one another, and was considered a good joke.[197]

> [on New Year's Day] the houses were decked with mountain ash...[198]

It was the expectation in some districts that by St. Bridget's day, the weather would be dry enough for fire-wood to be brought home:

> *Là Fhèill-Bhrìghde bàine, bheir na cait an connadh dhachaidh* [The day of fair St. Bridget, the cats will bring the firewood home] — Another saying, apparently better founded, associates this with St. Patrick's day, about which time the weather is generally dry... The Manx... corresponds to the above.[199]

I cannot give a reason why cats would be named as bringing the firewood home, although, like many proverbs, there is an obvious alliteration between *cait* and *connadh*. In these terms, one would think that *coin* [dogs] would have made a better correspondence with *connadh*, and perhaps the connotation is that 'even *cats* will bring the sticks home'.

There was a tale which helped explain the names of the Gaelic 'month names',[200] and the *Cailleach*, who personifies the winter in this tale, has a magic wand which she uses to keep nature in its dead wintry state. One scene

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196 Rev. W. Forsyth 1900, p. 35.
197 John G. Campbell 1902, p. 232.
198 *ibid*, p. 242.
199 *NGP*, p. 330.
200 See for example K. W. Grant 1911, pp. 129-139.

of the tale, when winter is finally giving way to the warmer weather, explains why no grass grows around the trunk of the holly tree:

> *Thig an sin a' Chailleach le a slacan, is buailidh si thall 's a bhos chumail sìos an fheòir. 'S chunnaic i gun robh e 'fairtleach' oirre. 'S thuirt i gun racha' i gu bun na craoibh chuilinn ud thall: ''S buailidh mi 'n sin far nach cinn doire no dos am feasd.'*[201]
>
> Then comes the old woman with her rod striking here and there to keep down the grass; but seeing that it got the better of her, she said, 'I will go to the root of yonder [holly] tree, and there I will strike where neither thicket nor bush shall grow any more.'

A slightly different variant in verse is given by J. G. Campbell, who says that she tossed her wand into the holly bush:

> *Thilg i fo'n chraoibh chruaidh chuilinn*
> *Air nach do chinn gas feur no fionnadh riamh...*[202]
>
> Which she threw under the hard holly tree
> On which not a blade of grass or stubble ever grew...

Consistent with the Christian imagery of the resurrection and nature's empathy with Christ, it was believed that no tree would bloom until Easter: *'Cha tig air crannaibh gu'n tig Càisg'*.[203] The order in which trees bloomed was carefully observed as well, for '...the oak and the ash foretell whether it is to be a wet or a dry season, by whichever of them comes first into leaf — if the ash comes first into leaf, it is to be a very wet summer; but very dry if the oak comes first'.[204] There seems to be some confusion, however, as to which tree signifies dry weather:

> *Cha tig a' chraobh [an t-uinnsean] fo làn dhuilleach cho tràth ris na craobhan eile. Tha i fhèin 's an darach air dheireadh, agus chanadh ar sinnsir gu robh e mar chomharradh air samhradh fliuch ri thighinn, nan tigeadh an t-uinnsean fo dhuilleach roimh 'n darach. Ach tha seanfhacal eile calg-dhìreach an aghaidh sin...*[205]
>
> This tree [the ash] doesn't bloom fully as soon as the other trees. It and the oak are the last ones, and our ancestors said that it was a sign of a wet summer to come, if the ash were to bloom before the oak. There is another proverb, however, which totally contradicts this...

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201 Ronald Black 1996, pp. 46-7. See *CG* VI, p. 70, for a variant.
202 John G. Campbell 1902, p. 254.
203 *NGP*, p. 143.
204 Charles Fergusson 1878, p. 133.
205 Mac 'ille Mhaoil 1958, *Gairm* 26, p. 154.

The summer, or, according to Celtic dichotomy, the bright half of the year, was ushered in by the coming of *Bealltainn*. Like *Samhainn*, this was a liminal time which allowed the uncontrollable forces from the Otherworld to wreak havoc unless proper precautions were taken. As has been observed in Ireland, 'The impression that boundaries are being redefined and reaffirmed at Bealtaine is reinforced by the verdure customs peculiar to the festival.'[206] Thus, in Scotland, 'On the night preceeding it, i.e., Beltane eve, witches were awake... the house was hung with rowan-tree...'[207]

> Branches of the mountain-ash, decorated with heath and flowers which had been carried thrice around the fires kindled at Beltane, were reared above their own dwellings, to remain until displaced by those of the succeeding season.[208]

Another important custom at *Bealltainn* was the lighting of fires, discussed below.

Better weather, and with it, the flowering of nature was expected, as symbolised by the young foliage on trees. 'It used to be said that a season was well advanced if the birch leaves were as big as a mouse's ear at Whitsunday — "*Buachailleachd nan laogh 's a' Bheith Òg* [Herding the calves in the young birch wood]"...'.[209] This anticipation can also be found in song:

> *Glèidhidh 'n talamh chum an t-samhraidh*
> *Sin a chrann e 'n dràsd'*
> *Beithe 's Calltainn, Latha Bealltainn*
> *Gealltanach air fàs...*[210]
>
> The earth will keep for the summer
> This is what it has ploughed at the moment:
> Birch and hazel, on Beltane day,
> Promising for growth...

Quite a number of songs to the summer were composed by Gaelic poets, including Donnchadh Bàn, Uilleam Ros, Eòghan MacLachlainn and Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, all including descriptions of the trees during this season.

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206 Patricia Lysaght 1993, p. 39.
207 John G. Campbell 1902, p. 270. See also Ronald Hutton 1996, p. 380.
208 John Dalyell 1834, p. 9.
209 Thomas Sinton 1910, p. 211.
210 Rob Donn, p. 120, Town and Country Life Dialogue.

Protective Practices

Amongst those practices termed by modern society as 'superstitions' there are measures taken by people to prevent calamity, failure or bad luck. Such preventative measures took many forms, depending on the occasion and the nature of the danger which was expected, but wood and wooden items play a notable role. Examples were met above in discussion of calendar customs, where tree boughs or branches were used to assert the vitality and health of the human agent against the forces which threatened these same qualities. Other such examples of trees used as protection can be found in other contexts.

The rowan has a very prominent function in protective practices. Indeed, the fame of the rowan as a defensive against evil must have very ancient origins for it to be so universally regarded throughout Britain and Ireland alike. 'They use against Witchcraft the Ran [rowan] tree, Kyrdhync [*Caorann*], especially when they go to Sea.'[211] 'The mountain ash (*Caorann*) was the most powerful charm of any.'[212]

Items made of rowan were used in many activities to safeguard against the malignant influence of witches and supernatural beings. Infants and mothers shortly after child-birth were particularly vulnerable to being stolen by the *sìthichean* [Otherworld beings], no doubt due to the liminal state of childbirth, between life and death in which many women lost their lives. Infants were liable to be snatched by these beings and replaced with a changeling if the proper precautions weren't taken, and a rowan cross was one such amulet of protection.[213]

Animals were no less vulnerable than humans: 'The berry as well as the mountain ash was used to safeguard animals, and especially to avert mishap to [offspring-]bearing animals.'[214] As the Highland economy was so dependent upon cattle, and the diet upon milk products, it is not surprising that care was taken to safeguard cattle and their lactate produce:

> They carried their pails and three legged stools and *buarach*s [leg-shackles for the cattle] of strong hair rope, with a loop at one end and a large button on the other. The button was always made of rowan tree wood, so that milking-loving fairies

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211 John L. Campbell 1975, p. 67.
212 John G. Campbell 1902, p. 11.
213 W. G. Stewart 1851, p. 76.
214 *CG* II, p. 245.

might never dare to keep from the pail the milk of a cow whose hind-legs were *buarach* bound.[215]

Indeed, even the *buarach* itself could be made of rowan withes for extra security.[216] 'The peg of the cow-shackle (*cnag chaorainn 's a' bhuaraich*) should be made of it, as well as the handle and cross (*crois na loinid*) of the churn staff.'[217] The poet Ailean Dall is said to have composed the following concerning his ability to concoct an efficacious counter-charm of rowan:

Badan de'n chaorann
Thig o aodunn Ealasaid
Cuir snaithn' dearg is sreang as
Cuir siud an ceann a' chrathadair
'S ged thigeadh buidseach Endor
Gun ceannsaicheadh Ailean i.[218]

A tuft of rowan twigs
Which comes from the face of Ailsa Craig
Put a red thread and knot from it
And place it on the end of a seed-basket
And even if the Witch of Endor came
Ailean could manage her.

Juniper is called *aiteal, aitionn* or *iubhair-beinne* [mountain-yew] in Gaelic, and it may be in part because of the perceived association of juniper with the yew that it has a tradition of being used as a sacred plant. Again, people were careful to safeguard their animals and the commodities derived from them: 'Juniper, pulled in a particular manner, was burned before the cattle and put in cow's tails.'[219] Juniper was also used as a personal protection 'by sea and land, and no house in which it is will take fire.'[220] It was often the custom to recite a verbal charm when a plant was extracted to render its application potent. Juniper was to be pulled by the roots with its branches made into four bunches, and taken between the five fingers while reciting the following charm:

Buainidh mis' an t-iubhar àigh
Roimh chòig aisnean croma Chrìosd
An ainm an Athar, a' Mhic 's an Spiorad Naoimh

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215 Osgood MacKenzie 1949, p. 25.
216 John F. Campbell 1960, p. 166.
217 John G. Campbell 1902, pp. 11-12.
218 *ibid*, p. 12.
219 *ibid*, p. 11.
220 *ibid*, p. 105. This belief is also mentioned by Father Alan MacDonald, p. 155.

Air bhàthadh, air ghàbhadh, 's air ghriobhag.[221]

I will pull the yew of fortune
Through the five bent ribs of Christ
In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost
Against drowning, danger and confusion.

If a newly married couple failed to conceive a child, this was often blamed on the spells cast by jealous admirers. In the following extract by Kinlochewe bard Duncan Mackenzie, the mother of the bride takes precautions that no malicious charms ruin the consummation of the marriage, including using juniper as a charm deterrent:

Nuair a chaidh a' chàraid a chadal
Bha 'chailleach 'gam faire gu treang;
Chuir i uisg'-òir air an casan
Is liath-lus is aitionn fo'n ceann
Bha i 'gan sianadh 's 'gan teagasg
An dòchas gun gineadh iad clann...[222]

When the couple went to sleep
The old woman was busy keeping watch;
She put gold-water[223] on their feet
And mugwort and juniper under their heads
She was saining them and bespelling them
In hopes that they would beget children...

Juniper was believed to be cleansing, and thus it was burned to prevent the spread of disease or to purify the air from disease-carrying agents:

> It was believed, during the plague in Scotland, that people who lived in the immediate neighbourhood of places abounding with juniper, or who burned it plentifully in their houses, were not readily, if at all affected with the plague.[224]

Indeed, there is an amusing account of the burning of juniper in the house on Hogmanay and the reaction it provoked from those present:

> ...piles of juniper are kindled into a conflagration in the different apartments of the house. Rising in fantastic curls, the fumes of the blazing juniper spread along the roof, and gradually condense themselves into an opaque cloud, filling the apartment with an odoriferous fumigation altogether overpowering. Penetrating

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221 J. G. Campbell 1902, p. 106. There is a longer variant of this in *CG* IV, p. 128.

222 William Mackenzie 1892, p. 99. The interpretation of the word *teagasg* as relating to counter-spells is based on the translation of the word given in Armstrong's Mid-Perthshire Dictionary. Mr. Ronald Black has pointed out a couple of other possibilities to me, however. This could refer to writing out a spell on paper, as was common at the time, or could simply be referring to what we might now call 'sex education'. However, given the context of magical protection, I prefer simply 'bespelling'.

223 This refers to putting coins in water and using the water in the rite. See *ibid*, p. 133.

224 *Old Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. 16, p. 110, Killearn Parish.

> into the inmost recesses of the patient's system (for patients they may well be called) it brings on an incessant shower of hicupping, sneezing, wheezing and coughing, highly demonstrative of its expectorating qualities. But it not unfrequently happens, that young... urchins, not relishing such physic, and unmindful of the important benefits they reap from it, diversify the scene by cries of suffocation and the like, which never fail to call forth from the more reflecting part of the family, if able to speak, a very severe reproof. Well knowing, however, that the more intense the *smuchdan*, the more propitious are its effects, the high priest, with dripping eyes and distorted mouth, continues his operations, regardless of the feelings of his flock, until he considers the dose fully sufficient — upon which he opens the vent, and the other crevices, to admit the genial fluid, to recover the spirits of the exhausted patients. He then proceeds to gratify the horses, cattle, and other bestial stock in the town, with the same entertainment in their turn.[225]

It may be for these reasons that juniper was woven into the wattles from which houses in Lochaber were being made in the seventeenth century.[226]

There is also evidence to suggest that *giuthas* [Scots pine] was considered a wood of protection, especially in the Central and Eastern Highlands. Like rowan, it could be used to protect the newly born baby and mother:

> A fir candle was lighted and carried three times round the bed, if it was in a position to allow of this being done, and if this could not be done, it was whirled three times round their heads... Among some of the fishing population a fir-candle or a basket containing bread and cheese was placed on the bed to keep the fairies at a distance.[227]

The *slabhraidh*, the chain which hung from the top of the house to the central fire and on which the cauldron hung, had an element of danger about it in Gaelic tradition. It seems to have been a means of access into the house for the *sìthichean*, and bits of fir wood — actually pieces cut to be fir-candles and left to dry — were placed into the links to stop such unwelcome intruders.[228]

Fir wood plays a prominent part in the tale of the ghost of Dòmhnull Gorm Mòr. When a family document went missing Dòmhnull Gorm Òg needed to confront the ghost and ask where it was. A wise man of the neighbourhood advised Dòmhnull Gorm Òg to take *seachd gathannan caol giuthais* [seven slender shafts of pine][229], with their tips alight, when going

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225 W. G. Stewart 1851, pp. 175-6.

226 John L. Campbell 1975, p. 25.

227 Rev. Walter Gregor, pp. 4-6. See also Joseph MacPherson 1929, pp. 8, 20, 21.

228 I. F. Grant 1961, p. 164; Elizabeth Taylor 1869, p. 325.

229 Campbell says that these can be oak, according to other variants of the tale, but they are also pine in the variant given in Alexander MacDonald 1919, pp. 18-19. John MacInnes informs me that the wording in his family tradition was *seachd dòrnanan giuthais* or *dòrnain ghiuthais de ghiuthas-bhlàir* [bog-pine].

into the castle to meet the ghost. After divulging the requested information, Dòmhnull Gorm Mòr and his two drinking companions made their exit through the wall, saying:

> *Mur bhi na gathannan caol giuthais*
> *Bhiodh seo gu d' phuthar-sa, 'Dhòmhnuill Ghuirm Òig.*[230]
>
> If it weren't for the slender shafts of pine
> This would be to your loss, O Dòmhnull Gorm Òg.

Given that fir appears so often in the form of a candle or a torch in these traditions, fire could be the underlying significance of the symbolism, rather than any quality inherent in the wood itself.

The only example that I have encountered of the *critheann* [aspen] having such a role is the proverb in Nicolson's collection:

> *Fear sam bith a dh'òlas bainne capaill le spàin chrithinn, cha ghabh e 'n triuthach ach aotrom* [He that drinks mare's milk with an aspen spoon will take whooping cough lightly] — The first part of this prescription is rational; the virtue of the spoon was supposed to be derived from the sacred character of the aspen tree.[231]

This is an interesting virtue of the aspen given the disregard in which it was held otherwise (discussed further below). There does seem to be some variation in the lore about the aspen and this may show a positive light on the aspen not recorded in other materials.

A walking stick was the constant companion not only of shepherds but of all foot-travellers in the old Highlands. The type of wood from which the stick was made was not only chosen according to 'practical' considerations, but according to the belief system as well: '...a walking-stick cut from the bird-cherry [*fiodhag(ach)*] prevents the bearer of it being lost in the mist'.[232]

A tradition recorded by Alexander Carmichael gives a list of the effects of four kinds of herdsman's staff:

> *Bata daraich, dàiridh crodh*
> *Bata beith, beiridh crodh*
> *Bata calltainn, call air chrodh*
> *Bata caorainn, caoil air chrodh.*[233]
>
> An oaken staff, cattle will be fecund,

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230 John G. Campbell 1902, pp. 212-3.
231 *NGP*, p. 205.
232 John Dixon 1886, p. 161.
233 *CG* VI, p. 12.

A birch staff, cattle will calve
A hazel staff, a loss of cattle
A rowan staff, starvation of cattle.

The alleged associations between the woods and the effects of the woods in this quatrain are linked by alliteration and assonance: *daraich ~ dàiridh, beith ~ beiridh*, etc. Puzzling as this list seems to be, Dr. John MacInnes confirms that he learnt an almost identical variant. It has been suggested to me[234] that the fruit of each of the trees reaches a key state approximately when the cattle are in particular states: when the acorn of the oak matures (late August to early October) the cattle are becoming fecund for impregnation; when the birch wood comes to leaf (in May) the cattle are giving birth; the hazel tree drops all of its nuts (late October) shortly before the culling of the cattle which will not be kept for the winter (Martinmas, November 10); although the berries on the rowan mature in late summer or early autumn, the young buds on this tree are consumed by deer and other animals in the lean winters.[235]

Trees and Wood 'Magic'

Another branch of those practices which the modern world labels 'superstition' involves the use of charms and spells to produce some effect on human, beast or nature. This kind of practice is recognised as 'magic' as defined by modern anthropologists and folklorists.[236]

Probably the best known example of magic in Gaelic tradition which involves wood is the *teine-èigin* [need-fire]. Martin Martin gives us an early description of the practice:

> The inhabitants here did also make use of a Fire call'd Tin-Egin, i.e., a forced fire, or Fire of necessity; which they used as an Antidote against the Plague or Murrain in Cattel; and it was perform'd thus: All the Fires in the Parish were extinguish'd, and then eighty-one marry'd Men, being thought the necessary number for effecting this Design, took two great Planks of Wood, and nine of 'em were employ'd by turns, who by their repeated Efforts rubb'd one of the Planks against the other until the Heat thereof produced Fire; and from this forc'd Fire each Family is equipp'd with new Fire, which is no sooner kindled, than a Pot full of Water is quickly set on it, and afterwards sprinkled upon the People infected with the Plague, or upon the Cattel that have the Murrain... (p. 113)

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234 By Ms. Jackie Brent and Mr. James MacDonald Reid, both of Edinburgh, personal communication.
235 Hugh Fife 1994, p. 147.
236 Maria Leach 1950, vol. 2, p. 660, 'magic'.

Cormac's Glossary, as well as Keating's seventeenth-century *History of Ireland*, tell us that the *Bealltainn* fires were believed to protect cattle from diseases.[237] A belief in the efficacy of these fires for purifying the cattle seems to have been generalised to any emergency situation.

To symbolise this renewal of nature and the human community at *Bealltainn*, all of the fires of the community were put out — a kind of community coma — and a new central fire started by certain chosen men by means of the *teine-èigin*.[238] Everyone would restart their home fire by bringing back a flame from this central fire. Martin does not mention the type of wood employed, although other accounts mention oak,[239] fir[240] and birchwood.[241]

A ritual for invoking supernatural powers in order to provide knowledge is called by Ramsay of Ochtertyre *taghairm an uisge* [the spirit-invocation of water]:

> It was last used by a tenant of the name of [MacCuidhein], whose predecessors were also farmers, for that art. He lived in the isle of Skye, near a beautiful cascade, on the water of Easbhercraig; and when consulted on any matter of consequence, he covered his whole body with a cow's hide, and placed himself between the water of the cascade and the rock. Another man attended with a heavy pole, whose office it was to give repeated strokes to the water to the man concealed behind it, crying now and then, *'Am maide feàrna seo?'*, i.e., 'Is this a stock of [alder]?' This operation was continued till it was perceived that [MacCuidhein] was frantic or furious; and he was then thought in a condition to answer the most important questions...[242]

A ceremony very similar to this is described in Armstrong's Gaelic Dictionary (published in 1825, reprinted in Dwelly, p. 920, *'taghairm'*). This would seem to be an independent account to that of Ramsay since Ramsay's papers were unpublished until 1888, there are several points of difference and this account is more detailed than Ramsay's. Armstrong describes only the wrapping of the seer in the bull-hide and his placement in the waterfall where he would be inspired by the spirits that frequent such places.

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237 Alwyn and Brinley Rees 1961, p. 158.
238 Rev. James MacDonald 1893, p. 273; John Ramsay 1888, p. 442.
239 *ibid*; *CG* II, pp. 332, 370; James MacDiarmid 1902, p. 128.
240 *ibid*, p. 128.
241 James Logan 1876, p. 68.
242 John Ramsay 1888, p. 460. See also note in John G. Campbell 1900, p. 309, where he mentions a note written by Sir Walter Scott based on information provided by Ramsay.

The other primary evidence we have for this particular ritual comes from Martin Martin, whose account of this practice, which he does not name, seems more consistent in its tree-human metaphor than Ramsay's explanation:

> ...a Company of Men, one of whom being detach'd by Lot, was afterwards carry'd to a River, which was the Boundary between two Villages; four of the Company laid hold on him, and having shut his Eyes, they took him by the Legs and Arms, and then tossing him and again, struck his Hips with force against the Bank. One of them cry'd out, What is that you have got here? Another answers, A Log of Birch-wood. The other cries again, Let his invisible Friends appear from all quarters, and let them relieve him by giving an Answer to our present Demands; and in a few Minutes after, a number of little Creatures came from the Sea...[243]

Although the watery location plays an important part all these accounts, the water is a liminal space and the apparent home of the creatures in Martin Martin's account, whereas water seems to be a means of inducing an altered state in the others. Whereas Martin Martin gives this ritual and the *Tarbh-fheis* [bull-sleep] (in which the vision-quester dons a bull-hide) as very different rituals, they seem to be somewhat conflated in Ramsay's account. From the information in these three descriptions, I believe that Ramsay has conflated (or passed on a conflation of) the ritual described by Armstrong with the motif of the alder stick, which seems to serve little purpose in Ramsay's account.

There seems to be a parallelism between Martin's explanation of this ritual and the sinister *taghairm* involving the roasting of the cat, for whose rescue the 'Master Cat' was to come.[244] One of the people present was to say, 'What are you doing?', to which the man turning the spit answered, 'I roast this Cat until his Friends answer the Question.' Thus, in the *taghairm* described by Martin Martin, the human 'victim' is feigned to be a piece of wood, to whose help the tree-spirits living in the water are asked to come. This is consistent with the human-tree parallelism discussed in Chapter One.

There is a common conjunction between tree, water and wisdom, to be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. Wagner, in an experimental exploration of pre-Christian religion in the Gaelic world, notes that an association between water and wisdom is 'firmly rooted in the religion of the

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243 Martin Martin 1716, p. 110.
244 *ibid*, p. 112.

early Mesopotamians' and notes that *Manannán* in Gaelic tradition, who dwells in *Emhain Abhlach* (the apple island of the Otherworld), appears to have some of these same characteristics.[245]

Magic-working humans appear in many tales and sometimes they make use of instruments. As the magic wand of the witch is an international folk motif,[246] and the word for witch in Gaelic, *buidseach*, is a borrowing from the English term,[247] it is likely that this magical accessory was borrowed at the same time. '...witches had a machinery of charms... and particularly a magic staff, called *an luirgean...*'[248] Seldom is any detail given about this staff, although in the tale *Ùruisg Coire nan Nuallan*, it is described thus: *'Bha slatag sheilich 'na làimh dheis... Dh'fhàs an t-slatag sheilich a bha 'na làimh 'na slacan druidheachd...* [There was a willow stick in her right hand... The willow stick that was in her hand became a wand of wizardry...]'.[249] The willow has a long association with witches in Northern Europe,[250] again suggesting that this is a motif borrowed into Gaelic oral tradition with the idea of witchery.

The use of wood in working magic does seem to have a long history in Gaelic tradition, however, as in an early Irish tale in which a druid used yew sticks carved with ogham to discover the whereabouts of Étain.[251] Anne Ross gives us notes about fragmentary recollections given to her by informants during her fieldwork in the Scottish Highlands:

> In central Perthshire there are still lingering memories about working the Evil Eye by means of sticks, the willow being used for this purpose; it was not possible to get an exact account of how this was done, but the counter-charm was performed by means of rowan.[252]

There is a Gaelic tale, of which there are variants from Lochaber,[253] Arasaig[254] and Dunbartonshire[255] (as well as a slightly different variant in

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245 Heinrich Wagner 1981, p. 9.
246 Maria Leach 1950 vol. 2, p. 1179, 'witch'.
247 Alexander MacBain 1911, p. 58.
248 John G. Campbell 1902, p. 6.
249 Rev. J. MacDougall 1896, p. 330. The tale also appears in *Mac Talla* vol. X, no. 17, p. 122; and in NLS MS. 9711, Box 5, Item 6, which are miscellaneous papers in William Matheson's collection. This latter may be the source for the others, as variant readings are given for some words.
250 Robert Graves 1961, p. 173.
251 Edited by Whitley Stokes in a footnote in *Revue Celtique* 12, p. 440.
252 Anne Ross 1976, p. 90.
253 J. G. MacKay 1914, p. 94.

Lallans from Skene in Aberdeenshire[256]) in which a magic-wielding drover is denied hospitality on his long way home and casts the niggardly home under a spell of dancing to death. When the man of the house has discovered that the rest of his family are doomed by this charm, he tracks down its caster and pleads for the spell to be broken. The wizard accepts his apology and explains what to do:

> *"...anns an ursainn os cionn an dorais... gheibh thu dealg dharaich... a stobadh ann a sin — slacan draodhachd mar a their iad ris... agus spionaidh tu as mar siud e... agus dh'fhaodte gum fuasgladh sin orra..."*[257]
>
> "...on the lintel above the door-way... you'll find an oak pin... lodged in there — a magic wand, as they call it... and you'll pull it out like so... and maybe that will release them..."

The other variations of the tale record the wood as being hazel (in Lochaber) and rowan (in Dunbartonshire). Two of the types of trees mentioned as 'magic wands', hazel and oak, are among the 'noble' trees of the Gaelic hierarchy, while the two others, willow and rowan, are among the 'commoners'. Both the hazel and the rowan have long-standing associations with Otherworld knowledge and power, while the willow, as has been discussed above, has associations with witchcraft.

Other Aspects of Trees in Belief System

It has already been noted in Chapter One that the alder was the archetypal 'base' wood and that equating a person to alder was considered very insulting. The belief that a person could be abducted by the *sìthichean* was very common in Gaeldom and it was commonly said that something was left in that person's place which resembled him or her, but which was in reality 'blocks of alder wood laid in their place'.[258] A cow stolen by the *sìthichean* was said to be replaced by alder wood, a 'dead man' left by the *sìthichean* was really a *maide feàrna* [stick of alder] and a wife stolen to the Otherworld was replaced by a *stoc feàrna* [stock of alder].[259]

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254 *Tocher* 15, p. 260.
255 Donald MacLeod 1894, p. 158.
256 Joseph MacPherson 1929, p. 185.
257 *Tocher* 15, p. 260.
258 James MacDiarmid 1902, p. 133.
259 John G. Campbell 1900, pp. 33, 87, 89.

The same thing could happen to an animal struck by the *sìthichean*: 'When an elf-smitten beast (*beathach a chaidh a ghonadh*) dies, it should not be eaten: its flesh is not flesh but a stock of alder-wood, an aged elf or some trashy substitute...'[260] 'People who are beaten to death, or enchanted in these Gaelic legends, are always falling like a faggot of sticks or twigs, *Cual Chrìonaich...*'[261]

A very archaic piece of lore concerning the relative life-spans of animals and plants, and which has parallels in Welsh, Greek and Buddhist tradition, was recorded in the Old Irish period.[262] The brief charm-like formula is given in one variation as:

Tregort crand
Trecrand cu
Trecu marcc
Tremarcc doen
Tredoen seth
Treseth nasc
Trenasc iach
Treiach eo
Tre.eo bith
Bithbeo dia.[263]

A stake is three times an arable field
A hound is three times a stake
A horse is three times a hound
A human being is three times a horse
A hawk is three times a human being
A deer is three times a hawk
A salmon is three times a deer
A yew-tree is three times a salmon
The World is three times a yew-tree
God is Eternal.

Were we to take this escalating sequence literally, with the first item lasting a single year (as the scribe of the Ó Cianáin Miscellany does, although he makes errors in his mathematical calculations) then a yew tree is expected to last 6561 years. However, we need not think of this formula as a literal mathematical table, but as a 'graduated scale' of ages, and age is clearly a cause

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260 *MWHT* vol. 2, p. 168.
261 *PTWH* vol. 2, p. 107.
262 James Carney 1969, pp. 129-130, provides the text and translation and some discussion. The parallels were discussed by Whitley Stokes in *Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore*, 1890, pp. xli-ii.
263 The version from O' Clery MS, Nat. Lib. of Ireland G 131, given in Carney, *ibid.*

for reverence and sacredness amongst traditional societies: 'age and veneration are the important elements in determining a sacred tree'.[264]

A variant of this in Scottish Gaelic has carried on in the oral tradition to the present day:

Trì aois coin, aois eich
Trì aois eich, aois duine
Trì aois duine, aois fèidh
Trì aois fèidh, aois fìrein
Trì aois fìrein, aois craoibh-dharaich.[265]

Three lives of a dog (is) the age of a horse
Three lives of a horse (is) the age of a man
Three lives of a man (is) the age of a deer
Three lives of a deer (is) the age of an eagle
Three lives of an eagle (is) the age of an oak.

Regarding the influence of the environment upon oral tradition, a variant of this lore was recorded in Harris in 1818 in which no trees appear at all, but apparently the yew (*iubhar*) has been replaced by the eagle (*iular*).[266]

It is noteworthy that the oak has replaced the yew as the tree of age and reverence in the common vernacular Scottish Gaelic version of this piece of lore. This is likely to be due to the prevalence of oak in native Scottish woodlands.[267] The belief in the extreme age of the oak can be verified by the references to it in other material. In the sixteenth century poem *Òran na Comhachaig* [The Owl's Song], for example, when the owl wants to impress her great age upon the listener, she sings:

Is comh-aois mise do'n daraig
Bha 'na faillean anns a' mhòintich;
'S iomadh linn a chuir mi romham
'S mi comhachag bhochd na Sròine...[268]

I am the same age as the oakling

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264 Alden Watson 1981, p. 165.

265 Given in Norman MacLeod 1910, p. 345 (from the original in *Cuairtear nan Gleann* in 1840's), and copied from this source into *NGP* and J. G. MacKay 1931, p. 58. It does not appear in Mackintosh's 1819 edition of his proverbs, but appears in Nicolson's 1880 edition, which he acknowledged as drawing upon proverbs printed in *Cuairtear nan Gleann*. Dr. John MacInnes has told me that when he was young, he thought that this was 'what everyone knows'.

266 William MacGillivray 1996, pp. 100-1. The items are, in order, *duine, fiadh, fitheach, iular, an domhain mòr*. I think it likely that *iular* is a re-analysed substitution, rather than an intentional item, because, unlike the other variations, there are two birds mentioned in the Harris version, the other being the *fitheach* [raven], and additionally, *iular* appears directly before 'the world'.

267 Basil Clarke 1969, p. 194.

268 *BG*, l. 6603-6.

Who was a sapling on the moorland;
Many an age have I been through
I am the poor owl of Strone.

The oak plays a similar symbolic role in Merlin's discussion of his great age in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*.[269] Nicolson calls the following a *dubh-fhacal* [riddle]: *Galar as truime na 'n luaidhe, galar as buaine na 'n darach* [Disease heavier than lead, more lasting than the oak].[270] Regardless of the answer, the fact that lead was probably the densest and heaviest thing known to people at the time also implies that the oak was, in their minds, the oldest thing. A poet wishes:

Fhad 's a mhaireadh an darach
Gum biodh m' airealas làmh rium...[271]

As long as the oak tree would last
May my pledge stand beside me...

There are a number of other references to trees generally in Gaelic oral tradition in which the tree, or the forest, represents the ever-lasting. One of the best known is the proverb *Fhad 's a bhios craobh anns a' choill' bidh foill anns na Cuimeinich* [As long as there is a tree in the forest, there will be deceit in the Cummings].[272] Although it may seem a tautological statement — there is by definition no forest if there aren't any trees — there are other statements similar to this that suggest that the tree was an 'element' of the environment whose non-existence seemed unimaginable. Bàrd Thighearna Chola gives his best wishes to his patron's family by hoping that:

Biodh an sliochd ann gu buadhach
Fhad 's a bhios duilleach a' gluasad air crann...[273]

May that people be successful
As long as there is a leaf moving on a tree...

This kind of formula appears in a different guise very frequently in waulking songs discussing boats, such as the recurring:

Fhad 's a mhaireadh bìth no darach

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269 Basil Clarke 1969, p. 198.
270 *NGP*, p. 213.
271 Raoghall Donullach 1821, p. 58, 'Òran do dhuine àraid'.
272 *RC* II, p. 491; *NGP*, p. 152, where variants implicating the Campbells, the Mathesons and Skye-folk are also given.
273 *NBT*, p. 57, 'Do Thighearna Chola'.

No giuthas os cionn na mara...[274]

As long as pitch, oak
Or pine would last above water...

These formulæ are important in illuminating the otherwise unspoken beliefs in Gaeldom about the significance of trees.

Crossed and Sacred Dichotomies

The Gaelic tree hierarchy has already been discussed in Chapter One and many examples of its application in many spheres of activity have appeared in other contexts. This is not the only tree classification for which we have evidence, however. There seems to be another system of classification which deemed some woods 'fit for use' and other trees 'unfit'.[275] Whether or not this had any connotations of sacredness is very hard to tell, but it is worth recalling the definition of sacredness entailing a set of restrictions on use, restrictions that did not stop at what Modernist society considers to be 'secular' activity.[276]

The first evidence we have for this is in a Middle Irish version of the tale *Aidedh Ferghusa* [the Death of Fergus], edited by Standish O'Grady in *Silva Gadelica*. In this tale the king Iubhdan teaches the fire-servant Ferdedh what woods ought to be cut down and burnt, and what woods are not allowed to be burnt. The underlying rationale for this dichotomy is never explained. The most likely explanation is that the poem is merely an explanation of which trees burn well and which don't, and even Robert Graves points out a poem from Dartmoor similar to and consistent with the information in this poem.[277]

The poem in *Aidedh Ferghusa* includes, however, kennings and descriptions for trees giving magical associations, sometimes purporting to explain their suitability for burning : the willow must not be burned as it is 'sacred to poems', the rowan is 'the druid's tree' and the yew is 'sacred to feasts'. Laying out the trees mentioned according to hierarchy and 'combustibility' produces the following chart:

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274 *OLMNA*, pp. 39, 43, 100.
275 Some exploration of this topic has been done in Raghnall MacilleDhuibh 1996b.
276 Jane Hubert 1994, pp. 11, 13.
277 Robert Graves 1961, p. 169.

	Burn	Don't Burn
Noble	Oak Holly	Hazel Apple Yew (?)
Common	Rowan Alder Hawthorn Birch	Willow
Lower	Elder Aspen	Blackthorn
Bush	Bramble	

Note that this is consistent with the Old Irish legal poem discussed above[278] which dictates that the 'hospitallers of the forest', the apple and hazel, must not be destroyed. It has been suggested that this classification is meant to prevent the use for firewood of trees that have more important uses.[279]

It is not until Alexander Carmichael that any similar dichotomy is explicitly mentioned in Scottish Gaelic tradition. In his notes in *Carmina Gadelica*, especially regarding rites observed on holy days, he notes what trees were held to be appropriate for use and which were considered to be prohibited. He notes:

> ...the twig of any wood except the wild fig, the aspen, and the thorn. All these are forbidden, or 'crossed' as the people say, because of their ungracious conduct to the Gracious One...[280]

> The cake was toasted before a fire of rowan, yew, oak or other sacred wood.[281]

> The wand is generally of birch, broom, bramble, white willow, or other sacred wood, 'crossed' or banned wood being carefully avoided.[282]

> The bannock is toasted before a fire of fagots of rowan, or some other sacred wood.[283]

> The fire should be of *crìonach caon*, sacred fagots, such as the fagots of the oak, the rowan, the bramble, and others. The blackthorn, wild fig, trembling aspen, and other 'crossed' wood are avoided.[284]

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278 D. A. Binchy 1971.
279 Raghnall MacilleDhuibh 1996b, *passim*.
280 *CG* II, p. 132.
281 *CG* I, p. 162.
282 *ibid*, p. 168.
283 *ibid*, p. 194.
284 *ibid*, p. 201.

This sense of the word *cros* is confirmed in the dictionary by Father Allan (under *crosadh*), where it is glossed as 'reprimanded, disapproved'. Dr. John MacInnes confirms that he has heard the phrase *air a chrosadh* to mean 'forbidden'.

If we compile Carmichael's notes into a similar chart, tentatively equating 'burn' with 'blessed', the result is as follows (items which agree with information in the *Silva Gadelica* are underlined, those which disagree are given in outline):[285]

	Beannaichte **Blessed**	*Crosta* **Crossed**
Noble	Oak Yew (?)	
Common	Rowan Birch Willow	Fiodhag
Lower	Juniper	Blackthorn Aspen
Bush	Bramble	

Although there is a significant overlap, there are differences as well: the yew, willow and aspen seem to appear in opposite categories, the juniper and *fiodhag* (cherry or wild-fig) appear for the first time, and the hazel, holly and apple do not appear at all in the Scottish Gaelic scheme. Six of the items appear in both schemes with the same status and seven differ. Thus it is difficult to be sure that this is a continuity of the old belief system or a different ritual system developing independently but from common Gaelic tree beliefs, and hence inevitably resembling the classification in *Aidedh Ferghusa*.

Lore in the Bible, or apocryphal material based on characters and incidents in the Bible but not actually appearing in it, is often believed to be the origin and explanation for elements in the belief system of many cultures. This body of pseudo-Biblical material allows a Christian rationale to be given for the taboos, beliefs and sensibilities of the culture and to 'fill in the gaps' of

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285 Because of linguistic developments between the records of the Old Irish period and the later Scottish Gaelic period, two items in the chart are somewhat uncertain. The term *idath* appears as a commoner in the Old Irish Tree List (Fergus Kelly 1976b, p. 115) possibly meaning wild-cherry, but very little attested for. I have taken it to be equivalent to Gaelic *Fiodhag*, 'cherry, fig'. Also, the term *crann fir* occurs in the 'Lower' rank and Kelly takes this as referring to the juniper (pp. 119-20). Although *aitean* appears in the Old Irish Tree List as a 'Bush', it means 'gorse, furze', and underwent a semantic shift to mean 'juniper' in Scotland. Thus I am placing plants according to the plant itself rather than merely the name.

culturally specific information not available within the official text of the Church. It allows a native aesthetic to be synthesised with Christian theology without being self-conscious of its differing origin and may be an inevitable result of a highly creative oral culture which does not have direct and frequent access to written orthodoxy. The Stith-Thomson Motif Index classifies this sort of lore as A2721.

A number of trees are explained as having been crossed on account of events in the life of Christ.

> The stalk may be of any corn or grass except the reed, and the twig of any wood except the wild fig, the aspen and the thorn. All these are forbidden, or 'crossed' as the people say, because of their ungracious conduct to the Gracious One. The reed is 'crossed' because it carried the sponged dipped in vinegar; the fig-tree because of its inhospitality; the aspen because it held up its head haughtily, proud that the cross was made of its wood, when all of the trees of the forest — all save the aspen alone — bowed their heads in reverence to the King of glory passing by on the way to Calvary; and the thorn-tree because of its pickly pride in having been made into a crown for the King of kings.[286]

This explanation of the aspen's 'bad behaviour' to Christ and its use as the material for the cross is given several times by Carmichael,[287] and Father Allan confirms the story about the aspen.[288] The motif of a tree cursed for having been used as the cross appears in the Stith-Thomson Motif Index as A2721.2.1 and examples can be found in Finland, Estonia, England and the United States.

Of the *dris* [bramble], Carmichael says:

> It is spoken of as *an druise beannaichte* — the blessed bramble. It is said that a branch of the bramble was the wand with which Christ hastened the ass when going to Jerusalem, and the rod with which He drove the money-changers from the Temple.[289]

A well known story which appears in local variants concerns the harnessing of a supernatural being for the construction of a dwelling place. The best known version of the tale is commonly called *Glaistig Lianachain*.[290]

In the tale, there is either a descriptive note that all woods were employed in the construction of the house 'except the birdcherry [*fiodhagach*]'[291] or else

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286 *CG* II, pp. 132-3.
287 *ibid*, pp. 104, 259.
288 Father Allan MacDonald 1958, p. 85.
289 *CG* II, p. 275.
290 *Celtic Monthly* IX, pp. 188-9; *D*, p. 123; see list in *CG* V, p. 316 for other variants.
291 *Celtic Monthly* IX, p. 189.

the supernatural builder gives the cautionary note that any wood may be taken into the house except for this taboo wood: *'Gach fiodh 's a' choill' ach fiodhagach...* Every tree in the wood except cherry...'. Carmichael has elsewhere an apocryphal anecdote of the birdcherry being inhospitable.[292]

This prohibition may be a reflection of the blessed-crossed dichotomy. Carmichael also gives variants of this rhyme that add *critheann crainn, draigheann dreang, eidheann, iubhar cam* [aspen, snarling blackthorn, ivy and crooked yew] to the list of taboo trees.[293] The ivy and yew are listed by Carmichael as sacred trees.[294]

Ogham: the Tree alphabet?

No discussion of Celtic tree lore would be complete without considering Ogham, the old Gaelic alphabet consisting of a fixed number of inscribed tally strokes appearing on stone monuments and various other artefacts by the fifth century. A discussion of Ogham appears in a number of Gaelic manuscripts, including the linguistic tract *Auraicept na n-Éces*, previously discussed. In a tradition in a version of that tract discussing the nature and origins of the alphabet it is stated:

> *Asberat immoro araile co nach o dhainibh itir ainmnighter fedha inn n-ogaim isin Gædhelg acht o chrandaibh gen gu haichinter anniu araile crand dibh.*[295]
>
> Others, however, say that it is not from men that the Ogham vowels are named in Gaelic, but from trees, although some of these trees are not known today.

Thus, even by the Middle Irish period there was confusion as to the original significance of the letters and conflicting explanations of them. There were a number of features of Ogham which maintained this tree 'connection': the letters (and more specifically, the vowels) were called *feda* (equivalent to modern Scottish Gaelic *fiodhan*), meaning 'trees' or 'woods';[296] the consonants were called *táebomnai*, meaning 'the side of a tree trunk'; the single score of a letter is termed *flesc* [twig]; and so on.

Furthermore, the letter names were organised in terms of an ordered mnemonic system which often referred to trees. This verbal mnemonic

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292 *CG* II, p. 132.
293 *CG* II, p. 290; *CG* V, p. 316.
294 *CG* II, pp. 275, 280 for ivy.
295 George Calder 1917, p. 88.
296 Damian McManus, p. 3.

worked similarly to the system for remembering the names of the notes of the musical scale: 'Doe, a deer, a female deer, Ray, a drop of golden sun,' etc.[297]

It is clear from recent research that semantic shifts in Gaelic between the Primitive Irish period, when the names were coined, and later periods caused the meanings of some of the names to be forgotten. The tree names, were, however, the most stable category of words and hence the tree metaphor asserted itself all the more:

> In the Old Irish period the primary meanings of most of the letter names were still known and were the basis for three distinct series of kennings known technically as *Bríatharogam* 'word Ogam'. Some of the names, however, were already on the way to semantic redundancy and when their meanings had been obscured... the fact that the largest single semantic category within the nomenclature was an arboreal one, and the fact that the Irish word for the letter(s) *fid/feda* meant 'tree(s)' led to the 'alphabet végétal' fiction, an assertion that all the characters of the Ogham alphabet were named after trees.[298]

Thus this fiction was even prominent amongst the Gaelic learned order and has obscured the significance of Ogham until very recently.

The Ogham names of trees were used in learned poetry, even by Classical poets in Scotland. They were sometimes used in such obscure ways as to produce puzzles still baffling Gaelic scholars, as Professor William Gillies says of a poem in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*:

> ...this poem also follows the convention of encoding the name of the lady who has enthralled him — a Gaelic equivalent to the acrostic. Our poet uses the names of trees, which signify letters of the old ogham alphabet, to frame his clue to her name...[299]

When the antiquarians and seekers of Celtic esoterica began their re-interpretations of the Celtic past, they weren't slow in picking up the creative potential of Ogham. Speculations and wild theories about Ogham have flourished since the Druids came back into fashion and the 'New Age' movement has only served further to tangle the thicket.

Even though the lore associated with Ogham virtually disappeared with the demise of the old learned Gaelic order in the eighteenth century, the fact that the *Beith-Luis-Nin* alphabet (as Ogham is sometimes referred to) formerly provided the basis for a Gaelic academic environment and ethos

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297 Damian McManus, pp. 34-5, 42-3.
298 Damian McManus, p. 35.
299 William Gillies 1977a, p. 37. Poem by Iain MacMhuirich.

gives it the symbolic power of asserting that past, as when the twentieth-century Uist bard Dòmhnull Mac an t-Saoir says of the bards of Uist of old used Ogham to receive their education in Gaelic:

> *Le beith, luis agus Òghum*
> *Fhuair iad eòlas a leughadh...*[300]
>
> With birch (B), rowan (L) and Ogham
> They learned to read it [Gaelic]...

Chapter Conclusions

Trees have been exploited as resources in nearly every sphere of human activity. Their role in the Highland economy was reflected in their high status and sacred associations. The contribution of the tree to the many facets of life in Gaelic culture informed the imagery of the tree in Gaelic literature and tradition, having many parallels with the Tree of Life as found in cultures around the world.

Trees provided food and drink to humans and their livestock and foodstuffs from trees were used in life-cycle or calendar customs which draw upon the concept of the ever-renewing Tree of Life. The types of available wood resources had a direct impact on the design and construction of houses and other domestic equipment. Weapons and items of war and sport were quite often made of wood, as were most of the vessels that enabled men to travel the sea. Wood, then, might have been considered as the material which allowed humankind to master the elements. Trees not only provide an indication of the change of seasons but ritual items invested with the significance of the Tree of Life were used in the working of magic against the dangers inherent in liminal times.

With the degree to which people depended upon trees, it is little wonder that they accumulated a great deal of lore about the properties of trees and the manner in which they should be selected for use. It is also not surprising that the exploitation of wood resources by institutions from outwith the Gàidhealteachd should provoke a strong reaction among the Gaels and ultimately bring about an indifference to woods and woodlands which persists to the present.

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300 Donald Macintyre 1968, l. 584-5, 'Moladh nam Bàrd Uibhisteach'.

Chapter 4

Trees themselves

Chapter Introduction

In previous chapters I have discussed the ways in which trees have been used as metaphors for individuals and groups of humans and the way in which trees have been exploited literally and figuratively in material culture and oral tradition. In this chapter I will discuss the significance of trees and forests themselves as living entities at specific sites in Scottish Gaelic tradition.

It is the ultimate aim of this chapter to determine what attitude Gaels had towards trees and woods and what place these features had in Gaelic ontology. This is not an easy question, as such issues were not explicitly discussed in Gaelic writings. We must, instead, observe the roles of trees and woods in Gaelic folklife, infer the attitudes implicit in poetry and oral narrative regarding them and observe the ongoing dynamics between human civilisation and woodlands through the history of Gaeldom.

As has been mentioned in Chapters One and Two, trees have an important role in Gaelic cosmology and can be seen in a number of cases to function as an *axis mundi*. I will examine trees which feature at holy sites, such as churches, which appear from their names and from the lore associated with them to have a very long-standing sacred character. This is sometimes explained as being due to the association with, or blessing from, a saint. There appears to be resonances of the vitality and restorative qualities of the Tree of Life in the many trees associated with holy wells in the Highlands, and indeed the image of a Christian incarnation of the Tree of Life itself can be found in a number of Gaelic devotional poems.

I will also examine trees which commonly appear at sites associated with centres of power and the residences of social leaders. Although it is likely that, as in Ireland, the practice of inauguration under a sacred tribal *bile* would be responsible for accentuating the significance of trees on such sites, trees can also mark territorial boundaries and can be considered an indication of the virtues of the territory itself and the quality of the reign of the king who is responsible for ensuring the well-being of his people.

En masse, trees provide shelter and habitat for a range of wildlife. As these forests are marked off as forming a different living space from that of settled society, I will ask what sorts of associations this forested region might have had for Gaelic society. The forests loom so large in the Scottish imagination that recent scholars have attempted to discredit the notion of the Ancient Caledonian Forest. I will examine extant Scottish traditions about it and ask what such lore suggests about attitudes regarding woodlands in general. As woodlands in the Highlands were well depleted by the time that our documentary materials appear in any quantity, I will examine the effusions of Gaels who ventured off into the well forested lands of America for contrast and comparison with the specifically Scottish material.

Axis Mundi and *bile*

I have already alluded in Chapter One to the *bile* [sacred tree] in Gaelic cosmology and the associations with it that strongly suggest that it functioned as an *axis mundi* in archaic Gaelic thought. Irish literature (listed in Chapter One) refers to five primal sacred trees in Ireland, all of which grew from berries on an original single branch[1] and feature in a story relating to the creation of landscape.[2] The Rees brothers maintain that 'there can be no doubt that the underlying idea is that the trees symbolize the four quarters around the centre.'[3]

The *axis mundi* is represented in many forms of shamanism around the world as passing from the underworld through a 'hole' or 'opening' into the sky, and the epithet *dor nime* [door-way of heaven], given among thirty-two others in the *Dinnshenchas* for the tree *Eó Rossa,*[4] suggests that such cosmological features could be found in Gaelic tradition as well. In the Old Irish Triads is the entry: *'Fossugud HÉrenn: Mag mBile* [The Stability of Ireland: Moville (the plain of the *bile*)]'.[5]

While there can be little doubt that such sacred trees featured in the archaic, or archaistic, cosmology of Ireland, is there any trace of such beliefs in

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[1] Alden Watson 1981, p. 165.
[2] *ibid*, pp. 172-3.
[3] Alwyn and Brinley Rees 1961, p. 120; Alden Watson 1981, p. 174.
[4] Alden Watson 1981, pp. 174-5.
[5] Kuno Meyer 1906, triad no. 28.

Scotland? Very little seems to remain. There is some evidence, however, to suggest that trees were part of the cosmological topography of Scotland.

An account recorded in the middle of the twentieth century from the isle of Arran mentions a tree in the centre of the isle where laws and justice were dispensed. The fact that the tree was said to be at the centre of the island, and its important socio-political associations of law-giving suggest that it may be a very old relic:

> *...tha àite their iad Gleann Laogh ris, agus... tha craobh dlùth dhà, agus tha iad ag ràdh gun i dìreach meadhan an eilein ge b'e rathad a thigeadh thu...*[6]
>
> ... there is a place which they call Glenloy and... there is a tree close to it and they say that it is in the exact centre of the island, no matter which way you come...

There is a tradition that there was an oak tree growing in Leitir Fura in Sleat, Skye: 'Leitir Fura got its name from *Fura Mhòr*, a great oak tree that grew there. At the height of a hot summer day it gave shade for forty (some said fifty) head of cattle...'.[7] The tremendous size of the tree and its role as protector are features commonly found in the *axis mundi bile.*

Although it may be merely poetical fancy, it may also be significant that a humorous poem from the Kintail area, probably from the early nineteenth-century, describes an enterprise to fly to the moon to cut down the enormous tree growing there:

> *...Labhair Aonghus gu sùghar*
> *Ma chreiceas tu 'chraobh bitheas tu pàidht...*
> *A chraobh le cuid barrach a bhuain*
> *A chraobh 'mhaireas gu sìorraidh*
> *Anns a' ghealaich...*[8]
>
> Angus spoke sensibly
> If you sell the tree you will be paid up
> To cut the tree with all of its foliage
> The tree that lasts forever
> In the moon...

It is possible that this is a reference to a tradition that the moon had an *Axis Mundi bile* corresponding to the earthly one.

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[6] *Tocher* 21, pp. 189-190.
[7] John MacInnes 1988, p. 413.
[8] George Henderson 1898, p. 175. See also Angus Matheson 1951, p. 369; *TGSI* 8, p. 105.

Sacred Trees at Holy Sites

There are a number of sacred sites in Scotland which attest to an extremely long continuity of ritual and reverence and significant trees can be found in some of them. Early Classical sources record that the Continental Celts used the term *Nemeton* for their sacred places, a term corresponding to the Old Irish term *nemed*, meaning 'sacred, noble' or 'a sacred place'.[9] It is interesting that, while this term appears in well over a dozen examples in Scotland listed by William J. Watson, only one Irish example was known to him.[10]

Probably the best known example is that of Fortingall, the home of a very ancient yew which has a claim as one of the oldest living organisms in Europe. The place name Duneaves in the parish (*Taigh-neimh(idh)* in local vernacular Gaelic) confirms that a *nemed* existed in the immediate area. Also worthy of note is that Kyltirie, believed by local tradition to be the central point of Scotland, is only a few miles away.[11] The near by place-name *Cois a' bhile* [The foot of the *bile*] may also refer to the sacred tree.[12] The convergence of these features — the tradition of a central place, the element *nemed* in the place-names and an ancient yew tree — all confirm the presence of an ancient *bile*.

The Pictish equivalent to Gaelic *bile* appears to be *pren*, a P-Celtic word cognate with Gaelic *crann*.[13] The Gaelic-Pictish place-name Kinpurney in Angus appears in 1607 as Kilpurny, 'the church of the *pren*',[14] and as it is very near to two nemeton names, Newtyle and Nevay, it may in fact be the holy tree of the sacred site.

There is a place-name *Lag a' Bhile* [the hollow of the *bile*] in Glenurquhart, close to *Creag Neimhidh* [the craig of the *nemed*].[15]

There are likely to be many other sacred sites, particularly *nemed* sites, whose associated trees have long since disappeared without a trace, and we can only speculate as to how common this conjuction of features might have been.

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[9] William J. Watson 1926, pp. 244-5.
[10] *ibid*, pp. 246-250.
[11] *ibid*, pp. 247-8.
[12] Although Iain Fraser takes the element *bile* in this name to refer to the nearby ledge.
[13] Dr. Simon Taylor, personal communication 14.7.97. See also William J. Watson 1926, p. 351.
[14] Given to me by Dr. Simon Taylor, from *RMS* vi no. 1841. These *nemeton* names are also given in G. W. S. Barrow 1998, pp. 56-9.
[15] W. R. Kermack 1953, p. 191.

Trees at Inaugural Sites and Royal Sites

I have already discussed in Chapter One the symbolic imagery shared by the leader of society and the *bile*. Trees seemed to have a particularly prominent role in the inauguration of the *rìgh* in archaic Gaeldom and are therefore salient features of many noble sites: 'There is ground for believing that a *bile* was regarded as an appropriate adjunct to a chiefly or kingly residence... [there is a] common occurrence in ancient Ireland of revered trees at the homesteads of important personages.'[16] Lucas lists about a dozen references to such royal trees which appear in Irish sources, particularly in Annals between the tenth and thirteenth centuries.[17] The thorn and birch are the only two types of trees named explicitly in Lucas' list.

A yew tree upon the site of Cashel plays an important part in the foundation legend of the *Eóganachta* dynasty of Munster:

> He saw a yew tree upon a rock... a druid interpreted the vision. That place would be the residence of the king of Munster for ever, and the first man to kindle fire under that yew-tree would be the ancestor of the kings of Munster...[18]

I have already mentioned in Chapter Three the ritual in Old Irish Law of lighting a fire as a symbolic act of taking possession. This seems to be the significance of the fire under the yew tree which itself seems to refer to the legendary origins of these kings: 'The name of the dynasty implies descent from a divine or human personage connected with the sacred yew tree...'.[19]

Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn composed a poem in praise of Turlogh Luineach, whose residence was at *Craobh* (modern form Creeve). It is significant that the royal dwelling itself was named after what was probably the inaugural tree. Tadhg Dall exploits the semantic range of *craobh* to praise the residence and his royal patron:

> *Baile do bhailtibh Í Néill*
> *an Chraobh shíodhamhail shoiléir...*
> *I gcionn deich mbliadhan do bhí*
> *ó do hoirdneadh an t-airdrí*
> *san Chraoibh ar dtógbháil toighe*
> *do chraoibh ógnáir Almhoine...*[20]

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16 A. T. Lucas 1963, pp. 20, 21. See also Alden Watson 1981, p. 170 and Francis Byrne 1973, p. 27.
17 A. T. Lucas 1963, pp. 25-6.
18 Miles Dillon 1946a, p. 37, 'Longes Chonaill Chuirc'.
19 Francis Byrne 1973, pp. 181-2.
20 E. Knott 1922-6, poem 8, §2, 4.

A settlement of those of O'Neill's
Lightsome, peaceful Creeve...
It was ten years since
The king had been ordained
In the Creeve, after the building a dwelling
By that gallant branch of Almhu...

It may well be that some place-names in Scotland, including Crieff,[21] directly correspond to this Irish example and thus refer to trees with a tribal or inaugural significance. Other likely candidates in Scotland include Crieff Hill near Dunkeld, an important political centre,[22] and Moncreiffe Hill, in the centre of Fortriu facing Abernethy.

We are on more stable ground in examining a number of *bile* names at places associated with noblemen. One such notable example is the place-name *Croit a' bhile* right at the main gate of Inveraray Castle.[23] The place-name Balavil near Kingussie is a corruption of *Baile a' bhile*, 'the steading of the *bile*', a site associated with the MacPhersons of Badenoch.[24] The village Bohuntin in Glen Roy is called colloquially in Gaelic as *Both-fhionntainn a' bhile* and it was for a long time the base of the *Sliochd an taighe* branch of the Keppoch MacDonalds. There is a *Creag Bhile* near to Cluny Castle in Badenoch.

The theme of the so-called 'pathetic fallacy' appears as a supernatural connection between nobleman and *bile* in the following anecdote:

> Another Tobar na Bile is between Torran and Inverliver, by the road side two miles or so from Ford... For legend tells us that when some Inverliver chieftain was abroad, that the family jester one day noticed the water beginning to sink and by-and-by disappearing. But one happy morning he found the well again full of water, and ran to the house crying out that his master was in Scotland, which afterwards proved to be the case.[25]

Duncan Campbell records that the place now called St. Colms was once called *Rait a' bhile*, 'the fortress of the *bile*'.[26]

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[21] The near-by placename Monzievaird < *Magh Bhàrd* supports the hypothesis that Crieff was the seat of a Gaelic magnate, as it was the custom to give a steading to the official poet which was nearby the seat of his magnate-employer. *CGP*, p. 4; John Bannerman 1996, *passim*.

[22] W. R. Kermack 1953, p. 191.

[23] John Dewar 1964, p. 290.

[24] Thomas Sinton 1906, p. 114.

[25] George Henderson 1911, pp. 185-6. It should be noted that *bile* is feminine as given in this example, although whether this is due to dialectical variation or other factors in the transmission or recording of this place name is not clear.

[26] Duncan Campbell 1888, p. 16.

It is worth mentioning that the name of one of the most important political centres in Scotland of the Roman era, Traprain Law, an *oppidum* of the *Votadini*, is derived from *tref* 'dwelling' + *pren*.[27]

The yew also appears in place-names associated with noble residences. There appears to be an old association between the Macnabs of Glendochart and an estate called Ewer (*Iubhar* [yew]) next to Loch Iubhair.[28] One folk tale begins by stating *'Bha a' cheud aon de Chloinn Lachainn Airdnamurchan a' gabhail còmhnuidh an Gleann na h-Iùbhraich* [The first member of the MacLachlans lived in the glen of the yew-grove]'.[29] Although Gleann Iubhar was named and existed before a branch of the Campbells made it one of their bases, it could be that it already had strategic importance, and hence 'royal' association before they arrived. Without further information, of course, we have no way of knowing if these yews had any special significance.

Trees are sometimes mentioned in folktale descriptions of royal residences. A summary of a Gaelic tale collected by John Francis Campbell begins 'There was a great tree in the town of the King of Èirinn and it was of great age.'[30] Another tale tells of an apple tree with magical qualities: *'...thèid thu suas do phàirc bhrèagh' a tha os cionn taigh an rìgh agus chì thu craobh ann an sin air am bheil ùbhlan...* [You'll go up to a beautiful field which is above the king's residence and you'll see a tree there on which are apples...]'.[31]

In general, however, references to royal *bilean* in Scotland are less common then to those in Ireland. This in part is due to a much smaller body of early documentary evidence in Scotland, but may also be due to an earlier centralisation in Scotland in the process of feudalisation, which increased and emphasised the status and power of the national monarchy at the expense of the more local rulers. Conversely, in Ireland, 'the king of each population group was solemnly inaugurated with customary rites at a traditional site and the practice survived up to the close of the 16th century in the case of those groups which retained some measure of independence.'[32]

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27 William J. Watson 1926, p. 352.
28 Rev. William Gillies 1938, p. 104.
29 Rev. J. MacDougall 1910, p. 250.
30 NLS 50.1.11. See also *MWHT* vol. 2, p. 337.
31 *MWHT* vol. 2, p. 200, 'The Three Soldiers'.
32 A. T. Lucas 1963, p. 25.

Trees associated with Saints

The early Christian saints have left a legacy of their missions in Scotland in the form of place-names and legends which were quite prolific in the oral tradition until at least the nineteenth-century. Some of these place-names and legends are attached to trees.[33] It is possible that some of these trees had spiritual significance in pre-Christian times and that the saint's cult attached itself to such trees in the process of Christianisation, although it would be impossible to make such a wide-sweeping generalisation about all such sites.

Local tradition credited Scotland's primary Gaelic saint, Colum Cille, with preaching in the island of Bernera off the south-west end of Lismore. It was said that he sometimes held his services under the shadow of a large yew tree, which received his blessing. True to the imagery of the *bile*, 'Under the shadow of the branches a thousand people could shelter.'[34] It was such an important landmark that it appears in poetic lore about the places of Lorn:

Dùn Stuadh 's Dà-innis
Air taobh tuath Lathurna
Is Bearnaraidh an iubhair uasail
Air taobh tuath Liosmoire.[35]

Dunstaffnage
On the north side of Lorne
And Bernera of the noble yew
On the north side of Lismore.

We are told that it became sacred because of its association with Colum Cille who prophesied about the ultimate fate of the tree, that 'pride and greed of man would hew down that noble tree, but that retribution would overtake the vandals. Their crime would only be expiated by water, blood and three fires.'[36]

The motif of the triple death appears in the punishment which was supposed to have been visited upon Campbell of Lochnell, who had the yew tree cut down in the middle of the nineteenth century: a workman was crushed and his blood dispersed upon the rocks; several lives of boatmen were lost at sea; and Campbell's house caught fire three times.

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33 *ibid*, pp. 35-9 for Irish examples.
34 Ian Carmichael, p. 42-3.
35 *ibid.* See also Carmichael-Watson MS 231 in University of Edinburgh Archives.
36 *ibid.*

Notwithstanding the damage done, 'To-day the Bernera yew is sprouting again!' This echoes Lucas' observation of these traditions of saintly trees: 'indestructibility is commonly asserted, and that, no matter how much it may be mutilated or otherwise injured, it immediately recovers itself—sprouting out as fresh as ever.'[37]

Saint Fáelán [Fillan], whose mission included the Loch Tay area, is said to have imparted the same sacredness to an ash in Killin:

> An old ash tree... is said to have sheltered the good man when performing the holy rite. It was regarded as sacrilege by the people of Killin to burn a branch of this tree, and when a former tenant of the mill ventured to use a fallen bough for firewood, the old folks shook their heads and croaked all sorts of dismal forebodings.[38]

It may be significant that there is another nearby site associated with St. Fillan whose name, *Creag Neamhaidh,* suggests an earlier *nemeton* site.[39]

The abbey of Holywood in the 12th century was founded on an earlier site recorded as Darcungal, according to Watson originally *Doire Congal* [Congal's oak copse][40] (or perhaps *Daurthech Congal* [Congal's oaken-house]).[41] The element *doire* [oak-copse] is a common element in many early Christian sites in Ireland.[42] This 'holy-wood' association with saints is paralleled by *Preas Ma-Ruibhe* [St. Mael-Rubha's thicket] near Strathpeffer.[43] There was, in ancient times, according to traditions of the Fraser country, a religious house at Bunchrew, originally the Gaelic name *Bun na craoibhe* [The base of the tree].[44]

There are a number of other associations about which little is known. There is a tree and well associated with St. Adamnán in Aboyne[45] and a St. Fincana was associated with an oak tree at Abernethy.[46] There are also holy trees at Inch Maree (*Innis Ma-Ruibhe,* the island of St. Mael-Rubha, discussed further below).[47]

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37 A. T. Lucas 1963, p. 37.
38 John MacDiarmid 1905, p. 144. See also Rev. William Gillies 1938, p. 81.
39 John MacDiarmid 1905, p. 146.
40 William J. Watson 1926, p. 169.
41 As suggested to me by Professor William Gillies.
42 A. T. Lucas 1963, pp. 28, 32; Mary Low 1996, p. 84, 91.
43 William J. Watson 1926, p. 169.
44 James Fraser 1905, p. 3.
45 William J. Watson 1926, p. 271.
46 M. MacLeod Banks 1941, p. 63.
47 John Dixon 1886, p. 7; M. MacLeod Banks 1941, p. 66.

A motif common in the lives of early Irish saints was that a staff took root and grew into a holy tree when the saint planted it in the ground.[48] This same motif also survives in what remains of some of the lives of the early Scottish saints, such as that of the twelfth century (or earlier) account of St. Serf:

> One day, however, the angel said to St. Serf, 'Go up on Mount Zion and go round about it.' St. Serf went up and went round about it. He was shown the tree from which the saving cross of Christ was hewn. Then the angel said to him, 'Cut four staves from this tree, and take them with you; they will have great power and reverence after you.' At the angel's words, St. Serf cut three staves; but the angel himself cut the wood of the biggest of them, and gave and commended it to St. Serf. Because of this, the saint held it in greater honour and guarded it with greater reverence...
>
> Then St. Serf came to Kinneil with no more than a hundred companions in his following; and he threw the staff he was holding across the seas, and a fruit tree grew from it, which is called *Morglas* by men of the present time. Then the angel said to him, 'That is where your body will rest, where that lovely tree has grown.'[49]

Even more in keeping with Celtic traditions of sites combining holy trees and wells (discussed more fully below) is the account in the life of St. Nynia:

> Meanwhile the youth landed and inspired by faith he planted the staff on the shore so that the merits of the man of God might be more widely known, asking God that as proof of such a great miracle the tree should send down roots and receive sap contrary to nature and sprout branches and leaves and produce flowers and fruit. The divinity propitiously heeded the prayer of the supplicant and soon the dry wood shot out roots and clothing itself in new bark, produced leaves and branches and afterwards growing into a lofty tree it demonstrates even now the power of Ninian. Miracle is added to miracle. At the root of the tree a very clear spring burst out and sent a crystal rivulet winding along with gentle murmur in a long course, both delightful to look at and sweet to drink, while useful and health-giving to the sick because of the merits of the saint.[50]

The legend here states explicitly that the holy tree and health-restoring well were currently still in existence and the life of the Saint claims to account for their origins. As we shall see below, healing wells are not infrequently next to trees held to be sacred. The 'Holy Rood' motif appears to have circulated in Gaelic oral tradition until very recently, for a tale from the Isle of Skye describes a disciple of St. Columba's who left his crozier in the ground and returned to seek it: 'for it had been made for him by a fellow novice from a branch of the great ash near his old monastery on the mainland... He

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48 Mary Low 1996, p. 79.
49 Alan MacQuarrie 1993, p. 146.
50 John MacQueen 1990, p. 119.

entered the clearing and, behold, there where his stick had been a magnificent ash tree stood, overtopping all the firs of the forest...'[51]

Trees at churches or graveyards

Given the very old tradition of venerating trees, it is not surprising that a number of churches, such as that in Fortingall, were established on sites where sacred trees existed. There were also, of course, 'economic' reasons for planting churches and religious orders in or near woods, many of these reasons having been established in the previous chapter, and it is noteworthy that monasteries were quick to establish their forestry rights when feudalism formalised them.[52] Economic concerns by themselves, however, are not sufficient to explain the early associations between trees and churches.[53]

Lucas lists seventeen early place-names in Ireland which are combinations of *ceall* [church, locative *cill*] and *iubhair* [yew], suggesting that the proportion of trees appearing in church names is relatively high compared with other sorts of natural features appearing in place-names of churches.[54] This yew-church combination may be matched in Scotland by Kilneuair on Loch Awe, Argyll, although it is surprising that no other examples have yet emerged in Scotland.[55]

In Scotland the Gaelic-Brythonic hybrid *cill* + *pren* [(sacred) tree] may be more indicative of churches founded at holy tree sites, as the early churches were commonly established by Gaelic monks amongst a P-Celtic population. Through time the name was often changed into a form such as Kilburn. There is an example of a Kilpurny in Angus,[56] and a number of other possibilities whose earlier forms need to be checked.[57]

Some of the trees near to church sites are held to be sacred, or at least cutting them is taboo, as in the case of trees in the parish of St. Ninian, where there stood 'a range of green trees all of equal size... looked upon by the superstitious papists as sacred trees from which they reckon it sacriledge to

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51 Otta Swire 1952, pp. 9-11.
52 Mark Anderson 1967, p. 131.
53 A. T. Lucas 1963, p. 29.
54 *ibid*, p. 33.
55 Mr. Ronald Black has informed me that he believes this name to be *Cill Fhionnbhairr*.
56 Cited above and given to me by Dr. Simon Taylor.
57 There is, for example, Kilburns NO3725 FIF, Kilburn NS2160 AYR, NS4756 RNF, NY2095 DMF, NO3568 ANG, NO0732 PER. I owe these references to Ian Fraser, who warns that some of these forms might be adaptations of the 'Kiln-burn' or of Gaelic *Coille-pren*.

take as much as a branch or any fruit.'[58] The advice *tagh iubhair an lèana* [choose the yew of the meadow], discussed in the previous chapter, may be a reflection of lore steering people away from exploiting such taboo wood.

Two separate accounts of a Perthshire site suggest another such example of a holy tree upon a Christianised site:

> In the Sma' Glen, Conyacha, three or four miles west from Newton Bridge, there is a solitary old Scots fir with an interesting history... It stands near a spot known as "The Kirk of the Wood," or "The Kirk of the Grove,"... It is said that at some remote period a rude chapel stood here, the remains of which may still be traced in huge boulders... The fir stands near the ruins of this old chapel, and in a superstitious age, it was credited with possessing very extraordinary virtues, it being said that if any person cut a branch from this tree he died, while the branch lived.[59]

> The corrie of the cave contains a remarkable pile of boulders called *Eaglais an Doire*. There is also a very old Scotch fir of great girth considering the elevation at which it stands... There was an old tradition that whoever would cut a branch of the tree would sleep never to waken again...[60]

A similar belief lingered in Inverness-shire: 'In Duthell parish, Strathspey, was Chapel Piglag, which was reputed to be sacred and nobody would cut a branch out of it. It was called the Bush of the Chapel, in which was the well of the Chapel.'[61]

Burial grounds were commonly established within consecrated grounds, namely that of a church, and there are at least two examples in Scotland of place-names indicating a graveyard at a *bile*, both named *Cladh (a') Bhile*, one in Knapdale and the other in Kintyre.[62]

Trees and Wells

A great many holy wells have been revered and resorted to in times of illness and as a regular calendar custom. There are an estimated three thousand holy wells in Ireland and the number of wells in Scotland must be considerable as well, though I have not found any estimates. The earliest example of a holy well on record in Scotland is in the 7th century *Life of St. Columba*.[63]

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58 Walter MacFarlane 1900, *Geographical Collections* vol. 1, p. 241.
59 Thomas Hunter 1883, p. 363.
60 NLS MS 462 (Robertson Collection), p. 81.
61 Mark Anderson 1967, p. 302. The name Piglag looks rather unusual, and I suspect that the word *eaglais* may be in it.
62 George Henderson 1911, p. 186.
63 Book II, §11. See also A. T. Lucas 1963, p. 40.

Some of these wells were accompanied by a tree, which, according to George Henderson, functioned as a kind of votive site for the genius of the water: 'To leave something on the tree or bush near by the well was an essential; this bound one's offering to the habitation of the deity of the spring...'[64] The association of a tree with a well has even been assigned a code in the Stith-Thompson Motif Index, V134.0.1, and the motif appears very early in Gaelic tradition, such as in the Life of Nynia quoted above.

Probably the most famous holy well and tree in Irish myth is the well of Segais, at the source of the Boyne, where the sacred hazel trees grew upon which were the hazel nuts of wisdom.[65] The hazels fell from the tree into the well and were carried by seven streams.[66] This tree thus has important cosmological motifs, being the source of knowledge and at the source of a sacred river. It is interesting to note that near the legendary Scandinavian *axis mundi* Yggdrasil is the fountain of Mimir ('meditation', 'memory') and the fountain of Urd, where the gods hold council and pass judgements.[67] Here, in Scandinavian myth, is a conjunction of tree-well-wisdom which is reminiscent of the Irish tradition of the well of Segais.

Rather than knowledge, however, most holy wells provide the sick with healing. One of the best known examples of a special tree at a holy well in Scotland in more recent times is that on the island in Loch Maree: 'Near it stands an oak tree, which is studded with nails. To each of these was originally attached a piece of clothing of some patient who had visited the spot. There are hundreds of nails...'[68]

Of the holy well at Loch Shiant (literally meaning 'holy loch') in Skye, Martin Martin tells us: 'There is a small coppice near to the well, and there is none of the Natives venture to cut the least branch of it, for fear of some signal judgement to follow upon it.'[69]

That the tree has a special role to play in sustaining the well is illustrated in some examples: 'In the parish of Monzie, Perthshire, is a mineral well held

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64 George Henderson 1911, p. 193.

65 The main references to the tree and its nuts can be found in the *Prose Dinnshenchas* and *Metrical Dinnshenchas*; in 'The Cauldron of Poesy', Liam Breatnach 1981, §11 and Appendix; and in an anecdote edited by Thurneysen in *ZCP* xvii, p. 268.

66 A. T. Lucas 1963, p. 22.

67 Mircea Eliade 1963, p. 276.

68 John Dixon 1886, p. 152.

69 Martin Martin 1716, p. 141.

in much esteem until about the year 1770. At that time two trees, until then the guardians of the spring, fell, and with their fall its virtue departed.'[70]

An old elm tree seems to have been the sacred tree at *Tobar Bhile na Beinne* [*bile*-well of the mountain]: 'Anyone who drank its water left some equivalent to the fairy who was supposed to guard it. "Beside it was a very old elm tree with a hole in the side and a hollow in the middle; and into this hole was thrown anything given..." '[71] Other *bile* trees associated with wells can be found in the placenames *Tobar na Bile* (cited above) and *Tobar bhile nam miann* [*bile*-well of the wishes] in Benderloch.

The motif of tree and well also appears in folktales. In one, it is simply stated 'and beside the well... there is a tree with a hollow in its side (*sloc 'na thaobh*), and no one goes past it without putting something of more or less value in.'[72]

The English name of the following Perthshire well completely obscures its original Gaelic name and function: 'Santa Crux well south-east of Loch Ordie locally known as Grew's Well, or in Gaelic *Tobar Craoibh*, was wont to be resorted to as a healing well...'[73] There was also a *Tobar na Craoibhe* in Islay.[74] The following tradition surrounded *Tobar an Iubhair* [The Yew-tree well]:

> Once a yew tree stood beside the well, and besides being a kind of landmark, giving its name to the well, it also affected the waters favourably... But some one cut the tree down, and the well has lost much of its healing properties.
> There was a malediction on him who cut down the yew :—
>
> *Tobar an iubhair, tobar an iubhair*
> *'S ann duit bu chòir a bhith uasal;*
> *Tha leabaidh deas ann an Ifrinn*
> *Do'n fhear a ghèarr a' chraobh mu d' chluasan.*[75]
>
> Well of the yew, well of the yew,
> It is to you that it is proper to be noble;
> There is a bed ready in Hell
> For the man who cut the tree about your ears (ie, rim).

As several of the above examples illustrate, a tree near a sacred well was often itself considered sacred and the using of its wood taboo.[76] We might

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70 James Mackinlay 1893, p. 236.
71 George Henderson 1911, p. 185.
72 John G. Campbell 1895, p. 75.
73 NLS MS 462 (Robertson Collection), p. 73.
74 M. MacLeod Banks 1937, p. 169.
75 *ibid*, p. 166.
76 The taboo against using a particular tree's wood has been classified as Stith Thompson Motif C513.1.

well ask why and how the tree came to considered sacred and how the roles of the tree and well interact.

It may have simply been a development based on the practices at holy wells. According to some long-standing traditions in areas of the Gaelic world, a piece of cloth, representing an ailment or problem of the devotee, was left on the well tree to rot away and the offending condition with it.[77] The tree may have simply gained some of the reverence of the well for its role in this custom and other rituals like it.

In his studies of the symbolism of religions around the world, Mircea Eliade gives an extensive survey of the appearance of trees in myth and ritual in which the co-incidence of water with the tree is not at all uncommon. The sacred tree can occur, according to Eliade's analysis, in 'microcosmic' ritual spaces which make manifest cosmological principles. In interpreting the ultimate meaning of such symbolism, he notes: 'the tree, with its periodic regeneration, manifested the power of the sacred in the order of life. And when water came to complete this landscape, it signified latencies, seeds, and purification.'[78]

A cosmological hypothesis of the Gaelic association between tree and well might be that the tree is an incarnation of the *axis mundi*, joining heaven and earth with the regenerative powers of the subterranean world emerging at its roots. This hypothesis is consistent with the motifs of the well of Segais as well as the imagery of the tree and well in the biography of St. Nynia. That the well in Monzie was dependent upon its two trees as the sources of its 'power' is also consistent with this hypothesis, as is the disappearance of the well at *Tobar an Iubhair* when the yew tree was destroyed.

It must be stressed, however, that not all sacred wells have trees near them and there are well customs which are independent of the use and existence of trees.

The Tree of Life

Like other sacred tree symbolism, the Tree of Life can be found in many manifestations all around the world: '...the Tree of Life has been a basic symbol, especially in Near Eastern myth and ritual, and in folklore all over

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[77] A. T. Lucas 1963, pp. 40-1; Margaret Bennett 1995, *passim*.
[78] Mircea Eliade 1963, p. 271.

the world...'.[79] The earliest surviving accounts of this symbol occur in Babylonian cuneiform tablets, where Enki, the god of wisdom and the watery deep, is said to have planted the Tree of Life.[80] Thus the triad of tree-water-wisdom appears again in a truly ancient guise.

The Tree of Life emerges again in a slightly different guise in Hebrew tradition (itself largely derived from this earlier culture) in the Garden of Eden. Yahweh was also represented as manifesting himself to Abraham at the sacred tree at Mamre and the survival of this reverence for trees eventually caused a decree, stated in Deuteronomy, to be enacted against 'the planting of a grove of any trees unto the altar of the Lord.'[81]

Not only does this imagery persist in both Old and New Testaments,[82] it can be found all over the world far beyond areas of Mediterranean influence, as Eliade's survey illustrates. This motif, with many of its early associations, continued with great popularity in many Christian devotional works throughout the Middle Ages. It was eventually able to incorporate the Cross itself, for because Jesus bought humankind's salvation by giving his life on the Cross, the Cross became the vehicle for humankind's delivery and access to Paradise. The Tree of Life, then, becomes a central motif in the story of God's divine plan for humankind, having a pivotal role in the Fall of Man and in the redemption of humankind and as well as symbolising the enjoyment of eternal life in Heaven.

One poem on this theme appears in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*, although it seems to have been written by an Irish poet of the Ó Dálaigh dynasty. In this poem, addressed to the Cross, the Garden of Eden is characterised as *Parrthais na bport ngéagach* [Paradise of the homes of many branches] and the Tree of Life as *An bogchrann glan sídhe suairc* [The soft, pure, magical, pleasant tree].[83] The tree withers after Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, but three seeds of the tree remain. The poet addresses the Cross:

> *Fásais trí géaga as na gráinnibh...*
> *Tu-sa an treas crann do na crannaibh*
> *A Chroch Dé fa ndlighmid múith;*

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79 E. O. James 1968, p. 241.
80 *ibid*, p. 242.
81 *ibid*, p. 244.
82 See Mircea Eliade 1963, p. 282 for some examples.
83 Láimhbheartach Mac Cionnaith 1938, Poem 41, §10, 14.

Do bás 'gud thairngire ó thosach
id ghlainbhile dhosach dhlúith...
Gion gur fhás caor ort nó áirne
Nó ubhall cumhra nó cnú
Do shíol, clann deaghbhan an domhain
Dearbhadh as crann toraidh thú...
Is tú ar ndídean, is tú ar dtearmann
Is tú ar leigheas i ló an bhráith...[84]

Three saplings grew from the seeds...
You are the third tree of the trees
O Cross of God for whom we should have tenderness,
You were promised from the start
To be a thick-leaved, pure *bile*...
Although no berry or sloe grew on you
Nor fragrant apple nor nut:
Your offspring, the children of the goodly mortal woman,
Is proof that you are a prolific tree
You are our protection, you are our shelter
You are our healing on the day of judgement...

It is interesting to note how some of the imagery in the poem accords with the conventions of the Gaelic Panegyric Code: the fertility and virility of the tree are expressed, the term *bile* used and the tree's function as protector and deliverer is emphasised.

The Tree of Life appears much later in a number of Gaelic poems when the Highlands were being evangelised in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as in *Bean Torra Dhamh*'s celebration of the Christian life:

'N sin labhraidh 'm breitheamh ris na h-òighibh
Glic, dha òrdugh 'ghèill —
"A shluaigh tha beannaicht', teannaibh chum
Mo dheis, bho'n 's eòl dhomh sibh
'S an rìoghachd m' athar gabhaidh còmhnuidh
'S dèanaibh ceòl a sheinn
'S bho chraoibh na beatha faighibh sòlas
'S mairibh beò gach linn."[85]

Then the judge will speak to the maidens
Wisely, to yield to his order —
"O host who is blessed, approach to
My right side, as I know you,
And in my father's kingdom you will reside
And make music
And from the Tree of Life [you will] find solace
And live forever."

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[84] *ibid*, §25, 26, 33, 37.
[85] Rev. Alexander MacRae, 'Beatha na Buaidhe', p. 48.

The imagery of the Tree of Life appears twice in the surviving poetry of Dughall Bochanan, the eighteenth century Perthshire poet.[86] This poet has been noted as using vivid imagery from the environment of his audience to communicate his ideas, and it is significant that many of them would have walked through *Coille Dhubh Raithneach* [the Black Wood of Rannoch] to hear him.[87] Although he doesn't name it explicitly, it is clear in his prayer that it is upon the body of the Tree of Life symbolism that he is drawing:

O dèan mo phlanndach' ann an Crìosd!
'S mo chrìonach bristidh 'mach le blàth
Is bidh gach subhailc 's naomha gleus
Mar mheas a' lùb mo gheug gu làr.[88]

O plant me in Christ!
And my withered branch will burst out in flower
And every virtue most holy in its inspiration
Like fruit bending my branch to the ground.

He gives us a description of the Tree of Life in his elaborate poem *Latha a' Bhreitheanais* [The Day of Judgement]:

"Chum craobh na beath' tha 'm Pàrrais Dè
Le h-èibhneas teannaibh steach d'a còir;
'S a feartan iongantach gu lèir
Dearbhadh bhur n-uile chreuchd 's bhur leòn...
"Fo dosraich ùrar suidhibh sìos
Nach searg 's nach crìon am feasd a blàth;
'S mar smeòraichean am measg nan geug
Chum molaidh gleusaibh binn bhur càil.
"Le 'maise sàsaichibh bhur sùil
Is oirbh fo sgàil cha drùidh an teas;
O 'duilleach chùbhraidh òlaibh slàint'
Is bithibh neo-bhàsmhor le a meas.
"Gach uile mheas tha 'm Pàrrais Dè
Ta nis gu lèir neo-thoirmisgt' dhuibh...[89]

"Towards the Tree of Life that is in Paradise
Come ye into its presence with joy
And let of all of its wondrous virtues
Be proved by your every hurt and wound...
"Sit down under its flourishing foliage

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[86] Donald Meek 1996 explains how Dughall Bochanan often uses texts of English psalms as models upon which he bases his own poetry. However, neither in this article nor in his two other articles in *Gairm* does he mention the imagery of the Tree of Life and whether or not there was a model in the English texts for this.

[87] Personal communication, Mr. Ronald Black.

[88] Dughall Bochanan 1946, 'Ùrnuigh', p. 58.

[89] *ibid*, pp. 25-6.

Whose blossom will never wither or fade
And like mavises amidst the branches
Make your voices melodious to praise it.
"Satisfy your eye with its beauty
The heat won't beat you until its shade
Drink health from its fragrant leaf
And live undying from its fruit.
"Every single fruit that is in God's Paradise
Is now completely permitted to us...

The imagery is continued in the nineteenth century by Neil Morison in his poem in praise of Iain Gobha, who would be:

Bhith 'g innseadh chàch gun robh 'n t-slighe rèidh
Gu geat an àrois am faight' an t-slàinte
O'n chraoibh 'tha fàs ann le meas nach trèig:
Fo dhuilleach àghmhor gum faighte sàmhchar
O dhoinionn cràiteach 's o àmhghar gheur...[90]

Telling everyone that the path was smooth
To the palace gate where Salvation would be found
From the tree growing there with eternal fruit
Under glorious foliage tranquility would be found
From painful tempest and hard tribulation...

In her lament for the death of her brother, Lochaber bardess Màiri Nic Ealair describes the scene of their reunion in Heaven:

Coinnichidh sinn gun dàil ann an àros na mùirn'
Far bheil Craobh na Beatha 'fàs 's nach tig bàs oirnn dlùth...[91]

We will meet again without delay in the palace of joy
Where the Tree of Life grows so that Death can not come close to us...

The most developed example of the use of the imagery of the Tree of Life which I have found occurs in a devotional song which appeared anonymously in the nineteenth-century Gaelic magazine *An Gàidheal*. In this song, the Cross is celebrated as the Tree of Victory which has won humankind eternal life:

Crann nam Buadh

A chrois nam buadh, a chraobh an àigh
Coimeas dhutsa riamh cha d'fhàs
An coill' no 'n doire, 's tusa an crann
As bòidhche duilleach 's blàth a th'ann
'S caomh na tàirnean 's caomh a' chraobh

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90 George Henderson 1898, p. 103.
91 *An Gàidheal* VI, 1877, p. 104. Composed on his death in 1865.

A ghiùlain sac cho taitneach naomh.

Tog do ghuth le caithream bhinn
Cliù Mhic Dhè le dùrachd seinn
Mol an cath 's an d'fhuair e buaidh
Nuair thog iad air a chrann e suas
Far an d' thilg e 'n deò, o, deò nan gràs
Le 'bhàs 'toirt buaidh air guin a' bhàis.

Le deuchainn chunnaic Dia bho thùs
Gnìomh an làmh ri 'fhàint' cur cùil
Nuair dh'ith iad leis a' ghòraich meas
Na craoibh 'bha bacte dhaibh 's an Lios
'N sin rùnaich Dia gun tugt' air falbh
Air craoibh, an t-olc chuir craobh 'nan lorg.

Mar seo 'na ghliocas dh'òrduich Dia
Bho'n pheacadh is bho'n bhàs ar dìon;
Dh'fhàg eòlas Chrìosd maraon 's a ghaol
Innleachdain an deomhain faoin;
Bho'n bhall 's an d'rinn am Mealltair leòn

Shruth uisgeachan na beatha oirnn.
...
'S air fiodh a' Chroinn-cheusaidh chruaidh
Thairg e ìobairt-dhìolaidh suas.
...
Do gheugan lùb, a chraobh an àigh
Biodh d'fhiodh gu sùbailt faoilidh tlàth
An raige 'chinn 'ad chuislean daor
Nis taisicheadh mar fhiùran maoth
Is glac 'ad asgail mùirneach sèimh
Colainn naomh àrd rìgh nan Nèamh...[92]

The Tree of Powers

O cross of the powers, o tree of victory
No equal to you ever grew
In forest or grove, you are the tree
Of most beautiful leaf and flower there is
Gentle the nails and gentle the tree
Which carried such a holy lovely burden

Lift your voice in sweet exultation
Sing with joy the reknown of the Son of God
Praise the battle in which he won victory
When they raised him on the pole
On which he cast off his sweet life
With his death gaining victory over the pangs of death.

God saw from the beginning with suffering

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92 *ibid*, p. 107.

The deed of their hands ignoring His commandment
When they, in ignorance, ate the fruit
Of the tree that was forbidden to them in the garden
Then God desired to be taken away on a tree
The evil that the tree sent in their path.

Thus did God ordain in his wisdom
Our protection from sin and from death;
The wisdom and love of Christ left
The Devil's devices redundant;
From the spot where the Deceiver inflicted the wound

The waters of life flowed on us.
...
And on the wood of the cruel Crucifix
He offered up his sacrificial payment.
...
O tree of victory, bend your branches
May your wood be supple, generous, smooth
The toughness which grew in your dear veins
May it now soften like a tender sapling
And take to your joyous tranquil bosom
The holy body of the Heaven's High-king...

Another motif that appears in literature around the world associated with the Tree of Life is that of the hero who goes seeking it for the benefit of its fruits of immortality but must do battle with the monster who guards the tree.[93] Eliade points out the existence of this motif in the ancient Babylonian tale of Gilgamesh and infers the existence of this motif in the Tree of Knowledge (and Life) in the Genesis tale as well. Eliade also points to the motif in the Iranian tale of Ahriman, in Central Asian tradition, in the tale of Hercules and the garden of the Hesperides and the tale of Jason.

Variants of this motif were recognised by J. F. Campbell and George Henderson who produced a study of Gaelic parallels. The earliest full appearance of this motif is in *Laoidh Fhraoich* in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore* :[94]

Caorthann do bhí air Loch Máigh
do chímis an tráigh fá dheas
gacha ráithe gacha mí
toradh abaigh do bhí air.

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93 Mircea Eliade1963, p. 288.

94 Although the berries appear in the much earlier *Táin Bó Fraích*, they lack the medicinal properties explicitly stated in *Laoidh Fhraoich*. See discussion in Donald Meek 1984, p. 20. The motif also appears in *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada Agus Ghráinne*, ed. Nessa Ní Shéaghdha, pp. 64-5, but it does not appear in the vernacular Scottish Gaelic variants of the tale.

Sásamh bídh na caora sin
fá milse ná mil a bhláth
do chongbhadh an caorthann dearg
fear gan bhiadh go ceann naoi dtráth.

Bliadhain ar shaoghal gach fhir
do chuireadh sin, fá sgéal dearbh
go mbudh fhóirthin do lucht cneadh
fromhadh a mheas is é dearg.[95]

A rowan tree was over Loch Máigh
We could see the strand in the south
Every quarter, every month
There was ripe fruit on it.

Those berries were excellent food
Sweeter than honey was its bloom
The red rowan alone sustained a man
For the space of nine months.

A year was added to a man's life
By this (tree), it is a true tale
It was a cure for the injured
If they tasted the fruit while it was red.

This motif was maintained in many of the popular vernacular Scottish Gaelic versions of *Laoidh Fhraoich*, which was localised in several places in the Highlands.[96]

Trees indicating boundaries

It may seem surprising that trees, which are living organisms and therefore have limited life-spans, would be used traditionally for marking boundary territories. Trees were nonetheless recognised as being particularly useful types of boundary markers in the Old Irish commentary to the tract *Bretha Comaithchesa*, which suggests using a sacred tree (*bile feda*), a large oak (*rail*), a tree on a hillock (*dumae crainn*) or the stump of a large tree (*bun n-omnai*).[97]

The first example of this practice in Scotland appears in the notes in the Book of Deer from 12th century Aberdeenshire. Jackson's translation reads:

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[95] Neil Ross 1939, pp. 200-1, §8-10.
[96] Donald Meek 1984, pp. 12-3. See *LF*, pp. 30-3 for some vernacular versions.
[97] Fergus Kelly 1997, p. 409. See also p. 411.

'Cainneach son of MacDobarchon and Cathal gave Altrie of the cliff of the birch-tree of the river-bend as far as the birch-tree between the two Altries...'[98]

A tree appears in a Gaelic place rhyme enumerating landmarks in Lochaber:

> *Cho fad 's 'bhios clach an Creag an Fhithich*
> *No boinn'-uisge 'ruith an Trèig —*
> *Eadar craobh an Leabhair is Clach na Dìolta*
> *B'e siud Crìoch Ionar-Làire.*[99]
>
> As long as there is a stone in Creag an Fhithich
> Or a drop of water running in the Treig
> The following is the bounds of InverLaire
> Between the Tree of Leabhair and Clach na Dìolta

W. J. Watson notes the role of the Scottish place-name Prenteineth — the exact equivalent of the Irish *bile tened* [fire *bile*] — in fixing an extensive territorial boundary near Rutherglen.[100]

Seton Gordon recorded the tradition of a tree called *Craobh Phillidh* [the Tree of Returning], which, although it may be a folk etymology explaining a garbled place-name,[101] may reflect actual practice or the significance of the tree as the land-mark of a boundary:

> ...when the people of Rothiemurchus each summer went up to the hill shielings at the head of Loch Eanaich, this tree was a landmark to them. It is said that they drove the young cattle up to the shieling country before they themselves went there, and that it was necessary to accompany the stirks only as far as this tree...[102]

Trees of the Otherworld

As trees figure so prominently in belief systems around the world in symbolising the 'living cosmos, endlessly renewing itself',[103] it is no surprise that trees should appear as salient features of the Otherworld. Indeed, in Gaelic cosmology some of the names for the Otherworld reflect its timeless, undying nature: *Tìr nan Òg* [the Land of the Young], *Tìr nam Beò* [the Land of

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98 K. Jackson 1972, p. 34.

99 NLS MS 398 (Robertson Collection), p. 7.

100 William J. Watson 1926, p. 352. It is likely that during the centuries of Brittonic-Gaelic bilingualism that *pren* was adopted in Gaelic speech and used in the coining of place-names such as this, for as Professor Gillies points out to me, the genitive form *teinedh* is singularly Goidelic.

101 This place-name looks suspiciously mangled. Professor Gillies has suggested to me that this might have been earlier associated with the far-travelled *ùruisg Pealladh* (see William J. Watson 1926, p. 427), while Dr. John MacInnes has suggested that the second element might have originally been *bile*.

102 Seton Gordon 1935, pp. 362-3.

103 Mircea Eliade 1963, p. 267.

the Living], etc. Many of the early Irish poems describe the trees in the Otherworld, such as The Voyage of Bran:

Fid co mbláth & torad
for mbíd fíne fírbolad
fid cen erchra, cen esspath
fors fil duille co n-órdath.[104]

A wood and its blossom and fruit
On which are the true fragrance of the vine
An undecaying wood, flawless
On which is gold-hued foliage.

The first detail given in the eleventh century tale *Baile an Scáil* [The Phantom's Frenzy] after the Otherworld transitory mist falls is that 'They came to a plain where there was a golden tree...'.[105] Many of the early Irish tales in which the characters journey to the Otherworld do so via a 'transition scene' in a woodland, a plot device which was likely to have inspired the idea of the 'perilous forest' in later Arthurian Romance.

A poem in praise of Raghnall king of the Isle of Man, likens the island to the Otherworld island *Emhain Abhlach* [the appled isle]:

[B]aile suthach síth Emhna
cruthach in chrích a ttarla
ráith chaem os cinn cech dingna
'nab imdha craeb fhinn abhla...
Emain Abhlach na n-ibor...[106]

A fruitful steading is the fairy fort of Emhain
beautiful the bounds in which is found
a fair fort surpassing every dwelling
in which would be many bright apple branches...
Appled Emhain of the yews...

Much of this same symbolism can also be found in Scottish Gaelic literature and tradition. Otherworldly islands are to be found in a number of Scottish Gaelic folktales, and trees, often with magical properties, are usually prominent features of such islands, such as the island found in the tale 'The Three Soldiers': *'Bha 'sin an aon eilean a bu bhòidhche a chunnaic duine riamh 's gun nì ann ach craobhan is measan* [That was the single most

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104 Gerard Murphy 1951, pp. 92-3, §11.
105 Myles Dillon 1946a, p. 13.
106 Brian Ó Cuiv 1955, §1, 7.

beautiful island that anyone had ever seen, and it had nothing on it but trees and fruits].'[107]

There were numerous stories found by nineteenth century collectors of Gaelic folktales about *an t-Eilean Uaine* [the green island], with passages such as this:

> *Bha iad ùine mhath an sin [an t-Eilean Uaine] a' tighinn beò air meas nan craobh... Air là àraidh bha e 'siubhal ri taobh a' chladaich an uair a thug e 'n aire do dhoire 'm fagus do choille a bh' air thoiseach air. Ràinig e 'n doire, agus chunnaic e ann craobhan air an robh measan nach fac' e 'n leithid o 'n thàinig e do'n Eilean. Air cuid de na craobhan bha ùbhlan cho brèagha 's a chunnaic e riamh, agus air cuid eile de na h-ùbhlan 'bu ghràind'...*[108]
>
> They were a good while there [the Green Island] surviving on the fruit of the trees... One day he was journeying beside the sea-shore when he noticed a grove of trees close to the forest in front of him. He reached the grove and he saw trees there on which there were fruits the likes of which he'd never seen since he had arrived in the Island. On some of the trees were apples as beautiful as he'd ever seen, and on others were the ugliest apples...

There are also traditions of special tree sites in the Highland landscape that are associated with the *sìthichean* [the Otherworld people]. One of the more famous sites is *Tom na h-Iùbhraich* [The Yew-knoll], close to Inverness, already mentioned in Chapter Two as bearing the yew-tree from which the Stratherrick Frasers picked their clan plant badge. Also affirming its sacred character is that courts of law and horse-races were held there.[109] Another significant association of this site is with the *sìthichean*: '...the inhabitants of [*Tom na h-Iùbhraich*], which, not long ago, was the grand rendezvous of many of the fairy bands inhabiting the surrounding districts...'[110] This site was also one of several sites in which the Fianna were believed to be slumbering until woken to come to the aid of the Gaels: 'This legend... is identified with several places in the Highlands, and especially with *Tom na h-Iùbhraich*'.[111] This is the essence of the 'prophecy' recorded in poetic form in the Fernaig MS:

> *Ionbhar-nis an Dail-chlasg*
> *An toirear cath an tùir-glais*

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[107] *PTWH* vol. 1, p. 241.
[108] Rev. J. MacDougall 1891, pp. 245-6.
[109] James Fraser 1905, pp. 122, 446.
[110] W. G. Stewart 1851, p. 68.
[111] Rev. J. MacDougall 1891, p. 276. See also John G. Campbell 1891, p. 4; John G. Campbell 1900, p. 270.

A'n tig Mac Beathaig a-mach
Le 'lainn agus le 'lùireach
Tuitidh na Gàidheil ma seach
Mu Bhòrlum Tom na h-Iùbhraich.[112]

The Ness confluence in Dail-chlasg
In which the battle of the grey tower will be fought
From which Macbeth will emerge
With blades and with armour
The Gaels will fall, each in turn,
Around (the estate of) Borlum at Tom na h-Iùbhraich.

This prophecy continued to be invoked in Gaelic poetry, such as in John MacCodrom's praise of Clan Donald:

An uair a dhùisgeadh fir na h-Iùbhraich
Cò thigeadh air tùs ach Tòmas?[113]

When the men of the yew knoll would awaken
Who would come to the fore but Thomas?

There were certainly many less significant tree-*sìthe* sites in the Highland landscape. Sinton mentions two such sites in passing: *'An Sìthean*, or Fairy Knowe, pleasantly embowered, when I was young, with birch and hazel bushes' and *'An Sìthean Buidhe*, the knoll with the rowan tree...'.[114] In both cases there are trees with sacred associations growing on these hillocks.

J. G. Campbell gives us references to other tree-dwelling supernaturals: a *glaistig* who was reputed to take 'refuge at night in a particular yew tree' as well as an Otherworld being who would take stolen children to their abode in Coill' an Eannd.[115]

With this association between the Otherworld and trees, as well as the motif of the Tree of Life, it may not be surprising that Sìleas na Ceapaich says in her poem of Heaven:

'S na craobhan ann air lùbadh
Le meòir siùcair agus meala...[116]

---

[112] *DL*, p. 171. The Fernaig MS. is not written in Gaelic orthography, and there are difficulties in accepting MacFarlane's analysis of this poem. As Mr. Ronald Black has pointed out to me, as this is a variation on the Gaelic Messianic theme, it would probably make more sense if it were the *Gaill* who would fall at Macbeth's hand. The MS. has 'Ghayle', and similarly *Gall* appears elsewhere as 'Ghaile' (p. 179), while the disyllabic word *Gàidheil* appears as 'Gaijell' (p. 195). On the other hand, as (other than the first line), the lines are 7 syllables in length, *Gaill* would leave the line 1 syllable short.

[113] *BG*, l. 2017-8.

[114] Thomas Sinton 1910, p. 2 and Thomas Sinton 1906a, p. 333.

[115] *ibid*, pp. 173, 84.

[116] *BSC*, 'Am Bàs agus Flathanas', l. 1399-1400.

And the trees there are bent over
With branches of sugar and honey...

Trees in the panegyric code of land praise

The praise of homeland was a particularly common theme in the songs of exile of the nineteenth century, but the description of land, landscape and homeland was a well developed theme in Gaelic tradition from quite early times. The so-called 'pathetic fallacy', in which the goodness of a ruler is reflected in the condition of his lands, has already been mentioned several times since Chapter One. It is thus an oblique form of praise to a ruler to praise the beauty, fertility and bounty of his lands. This may be one of the original sources of the poetic conventions of the praise of homeland in Gaelic tradition, but it would be wrong to neglect the simple fact that people were extremely fond of their homeland and eulogised it in the most minute and affectionate detail.

The simplest form in which this praise was expressed was in the use of an epithet for an area, combining the place-name with a term indicative of trees and tree-cover. A few examples of such terms as *craobh* [tree], *geug* [branch] and *barrach* [foliage, branches; birchwood] are:

No Loch Shubhairn nan craobh àrda...[117]
Or Loch Sunart of the tall trees...

Bho Cheapaich nan craobh...[118]
From Keppoch of the trees...

Dol gu Fasadh nan craobh...[119]
To go to Fasadh of the trees...

Anns a' chathair aig Muile nan craobh...[120]
In the city in Mull of the trees...

Gleann Gallaidh nan craobh...[121]
Glengolly of the trees...

Bho Ghlinn Garadh nan geug...[122]

---

117 *HF* ii, l. 1553.
118 *AD*, p. 11.
119 *AD*, p. 182, 'Cumha do Choirneal Iain Camshron'.
120 *NBT*, p. 317, 'Fàilte Thearlaich Pheighinn nan Crois'.
121 Rob Donn 1899, p. 314, 'Glengolly'.
122 *GC*, p. 164, Iain Lom, 'Biodh an uidheam so triall'.

From Glengarry of the branches...

Nall a Raithneach nan geug...[123]
Over from Rannoch of the branches...

Mach o Mhòrair nan geugan...[124]
Out from Morar of the branches...

A thig o Chnòideart a' bharraich...[125]
Who comes from Knoydart of the brush...

'S an Arasaig dhubh-ghorm a' bharraich...[126]
And in shiny-green Arasaig of the brush...

'N Gleann Èit' a' bharraich bhòidhich...[127]
In Glen Etive of the beautiful brush...

Sometimes a particular kind of tree is mentioned or implied in these epithets:

'S o Cheapaich nam peuran...[128]
And from Keppoch of the pears...

Bha mi 'n Suaineart ghorm an daraich...[129]
I was in green Sunart of the oak...

Bha mi 'n Cill Donnain a' ghiuthais leat...[130]
I was in Kildonan of the pine with you...

Is Mac Griogair o Ruadhshruth chnò...[131]
And MacGregor from Ruaro of nuts...

Epithets may be used which do not include the place-name explicitly:

Do dh'fhearann nan craobh...[132]
To the land of the trees... (Canada)

Gleann nan coilltean 's nan raon
Gleann nan glacag 's nan craobh...[133]

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123 *OIL*, l. 23, 'Fògradh Raghnaill Òig'.
124 *HF* ii, l. 543.
125 *D*, p. 162, 'A chòmhraig-dheise'.
126 *OGBT*, p. 64, Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair.
127 John L. Campbell 1990, p. 191, 'Gur tu mo chruinneag bhòidheach'.
128 *GC*, p. 148, 'Òran do Mhac Mhic Raghnaill na Ceapaich'.
129 *HF* i, l. 1280.
130 *CG* V, p. 70, 'Seathan Mac Rìgh Èireann'.
131 *OIL*, l. 1724, 'Marbhrann do Shir Seumas Mac Dhòmhnaill'.
132 Donald Meek 1995, p. 48.
133 *The Kyles of Bute...*, 'Gleanndaruail mo chridhe', by John Sinclair.

the glen of the forests and the fields
the glen of the hollows and the trees...

Tìr nan ròs, nan cnò 's nan ùbhlan...[134]
...the land of the roses, the nuts and the apples...

Descriptive passages giving extended portrayal of trees and foliage of an area are very typical of poems in praise of place:

Cha tèid mi do cheann Loch Bhraoin
Far am faighear an sùbh craobh
Cnothan air a' challtainn chaol...[135]

I won't go to the head of Loch Broom
Where the berry bush is found
Nuts on the slender hazel...

This is particularly true in the case of the poetry of exile, where the emigrant paints the scene of his homeland as fertile and verdent:

Thoir mo shoraidh gu Ceann-trà
Far bheil fàileadh a' bharraich.
Far am bheil doireachan dlùtha
Is cnothan a' lùbadh gach meangain.
Far am bi a' mhil 's an t-Samhradh
'Sileadh bho gach crann de'n darach.[136]

Bear my greetings to Kintra
Where there is the scent of thick foliage
Where there are dense groves
And nuts bending every branch.
Where there is honey in the summer
Trickling from every branch of the oak.

Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair praises his new home in Morar with tree imagery:

Anns an doire chranntail
Cnothach, caorach, dearcach, braonach...
'Choill gu h-uile fo làn duillich
'S i 'na culaidh bainnse...
A bhuain fhaillein 's a dh'òl bainne
Rìgh! gur fallain m' annlan.[137]

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134 Iain Thornber 1983, p. 17, 'Do'n Mhorbhairne'.

135 *OLMNA*, p. 18; see also *HF* i, l. 1159, 1162. I have changed *sùgh chraobh*, as given in *OLMNA*, to *sùbh craobh*, as given in *HF* i. This was translated in *HF* as 'the sweet woodbine', although J. L. Campbell says in his notes that this 'means a raspberry bush, or any bush bearing berries.' The translation and notes of the same term in the poetry of Donnchadh Bàn (*ODB*, l. 3210) confirms that this is a generic berry bush term.

136 Mary MacKellar 1886, p. 215.

In the branchy grove
Full of nuts, berries, moisture...
The forest is totally in full bloom
In its wedding dress...
To reap branches and to drink milk
Lord! How healthy my provisions are!

He uses the same conventions in reverse, however, to curse and satirise the place he had to leave:

Bioran droighinn ann d'am bhriogadh...
Ionad cruaidh nan dris bu ghèire...[138]

Hooks of bramble to prick me...
The hard place of the sharpest brier...

John MacCodrum, however, a native of the nearly treeless North Uist, took a defiant swipe at Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, with whom he exchanged poetry and some mutual rivalry, by remarking:

'S mairg a mhol
A' Mhòrthir sgnogach
Air son stoban calltainn...[139]

Woe to him that praised
Shrivelled Morar
On account of some stubs of hazel...

A Gaelic poet from Cape Breton satirised the French of Cheticamp by describing the French land as:

Coille charraigeach gun chroinn innt'
Agus roinn bharr a buinn dhi;
Craobh beithe no uinnsinn
Cha chuimhne leam fàs ann.
Chan eil measan air mheòirean
No cnothan air calltainn
Mar bu lìonmhor 's na beanntan
Air am b' eòlach mi...[140]

A craggy forest without anything upright in it
And some (of the trees) uprooted;
I don't remember birch or ash
Ever growing there.
There aren't fruits on branches

---

137 Derick Thomson 1996, 'Fàilte na Mòrthir', l. 2231-2, 2244-5, 2282-4.
138 *ibid*, 'Imrich Alasdair MhicDhòmhnaill ás Eigneig Do dh'Inbhir-Aoidh', l. 2022, 2077.
139 *SJM*, 'An Aghaidh Fàilte na Mórthir', l. 694-6.
140 Charles Dunn 1968, p. 65.

Or nuts on the hazel
As I recall in the mountains
That I was familiar with...

The convention of mentioning the trees of an area when praising it, sometimes as the first detail mentioned, was so well established that some poets seem to have felt the need to apologise for their home's bareness, such as in the opening of Father Alan's praise of Eriskay. Being from Lochaber himself, perhaps he felt the need to defend it all the stronger:

Lom e 'dhuilleach, lom e 'mhuran
Lom e 'churachd eòrna
Air a luimead gura lurach
Leam-sa a h-uile fòd dheth...[141]

It is bare of leaf, bare of sea-bent grass
It is bare of the sowing of barley
Despite its bareness
Every sod of it is lovely to me.

Or the poet might try to find a way to use tree praise by drawing upon the human-tree metaphors:

'S ged nach fàsadh craobh 'nam dhùthaich
Gheibht' ann flùr nan cailean Gàidhealach...[142]

Although no tree would grow in my land
The flower of Gaelic girls was found there...

Cathal MacMhuirich (in the period between 1593 and 1618) begins a poem with *Foraois éigeas Innse Gall* [the Hebrides are a forest of learned men], drawing upon the human-tree metaphor, and in doing so uses the convention of tree praise for an area otherwise mostly bare of trees.[143]

It is very common for a poem in praise of a chieftain also to mention the fertility and prosperity of his land, and for a poem in praise of homeland to mention the rightful leaders of that place. Trees are very commonly used as the barometers of the state of the land and thereby of the ruler:

Gur ceutach do choille
'S gach doire mu'n cuairt dhuit
Gu badanach, dosrach
Air choslas an uaine
Le'n àrd chrainne ghiuthais

---

141 *BG*, l. 5-8.
142 *NBT*, p. 326, 'Òran do Chéilidh nan Gàidheal'.
143 See Ronald Black 1977 for the poem in full.

Darach 's iubhar ri'n gualainn
'S craobhan eile t' ann tuille
Nach urra mi luaidh dhuibh...[144]

Lovely is your wood
And every grove round about you
Full of thickets and shoots
In the colour of green
With their tall trees of Scots pine
Oak and yew to their shoulders
And so many other trees besides
That I can't mention [them all] to you...

Here the poet has not only described the literal flora of the area, but has also drawn upon the poetic conventions discussed in Chapter Two associating forest and human society. He implies that not only the forest itself, but his dependants are flourishing, mentioning specifically the noble trees in order to heighten the importance of his human subject.

Even Rodel, Harris, which may only appear heavily wooded to a native of the Outer Isles, is described by a poet in a poem in praise of its laird as:

...doire nan geug
Muigh air rèidhleach nan cnò
Ann an Ròdul craobhach...[145]

...The grove of the branches
Out on the plain of the nuts
In Rodel of many trees...

Donnchadh Bàn uses these conventions in his nature poetry to make subtle contemporary social statements, as has been discussed in an analysis of his poem *Moladh Beinn Dobhrain* [The Praise of Beinn Dobhrain] where the ideals of the Gaelic Panegyric Code are transferred metaphorically to a setting in nature which invokes the pathetic fallacy. The typical eulogy praises a chieftain for his ability to provide his guests generously, which necessarily means that he must be able to maintain a reasonable store of food. In a natural setting, where the guests are fauna, particularly the deer, and the larder is the flora of the environment, the ecological continuum is sustained, according to traditional Gaelic ontology, when the chieftain is fulfilling his proper obligations.[146]

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144 Iain MacGhigair 1801, p. 58-9, 'Do Rhidaire na h-Apun'.
145 George Henderson 1898, p. 71, 'A Chiad Òran do Mhorair Dunmore', Neil Morison.
146 William Gillies 1977b, pp. 46-7. Donncha Ó Corráin (1989, pp. 239-240) sees a similar analogy in his analysis of the poem 'A Marbáin, a díthrubaig'.

This rhetorical structure can also be seen in his two songs about Coire a' Cheathaich. In his first song, *Òran Coire a' Cheathaich* [The Song of Misty Corrie] he describes the natural beauty and fertility of this place, particularly in terms of tree imagery, and thus implies that all is well:

Bha cus r' a fhaotainn de chnothan caoine
'S cha b' iad na caochagan aotrom gann,
Ach bagailt mhaola bu taine plaoisg
A' toirt brìgh a laodhan nam maothshlat fann;
Srath nan caochan 'na dhosaibh caorainn
'S 'na phreasaibh caola, làn chraobh is mheang;
Na gallain ùra, 's na faillein dhlùtha
'S am barrach dùinte mu chùl nan crann.[147]

There were plenty of ripe nuts to be found
And they weren't a few light empty shells,
But naked clusters of the thinnest husks
Drawing vigour from pith of the tender twigs;
The strath of brooks is a mass of rowans
And stalky bushes, full of boughs and twigs;
The fresh branches and the dense shoots,
And the leaves enveloping the trees.

However, in the later poem *Cumha Coire a' Cheathaich* [The Lament for Misty Corrie] the poor stewardship of bailliff MacEwen has had terrible reprecussions upon the well-being of the human and natural community. His inability, or unsuitability, in this role in is made manifest, for example, by the trees:

Tha 'choille bh'anns an fhrìth ud,
Na cuislean fada dìreach,
Air tuiteam is air crìonadh
Sìos as an rùsg;
Na prisean a bha brìoghmhor,
Na dosaibh tiugha lìonmhor,
Air seacadh mar gun spìont' iad
A-nìos as an ùir;
Na failleanan bu bhòidhche,
Na slatan is na h-ògain,
'S an t-àit' am biodh an smeòrach
Gu mòdhar a' seinn ciùil —
Tha iad uil' air caochladh,
Cha d' fhuirich fiodh no fraoch ann
Tha 'm mullach bharr gach craoibhe
'S am maor 'ga thoirt diubh[148]

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147 *ODB*, l. 2406-13.
148 *ibid*, l. 2502-17.

The wood that was in that reserve,
The long straight trunks
Have fallen and withered
Down in their barks;
The thickets that were fruitful,
The thick plentiful bushes,
Have shrivelled as though (they were)
Torn up from the soil;
The shoots that were lovely,
The twigs and the saplings,
And the place where the mavis would
Sing music mellowly —
They have all changed,
No wood or heather endured there
The crest of every tree has fallen
Since the bailiff takes it from them.

It has been suggested to me[149] that the conventions of Classical Gaelic poetry might carry the arboreal biases of the Irish landscape. This could be argued to be demonstrated by the fact that only two tree types are named in Classical Gaelic poetry from Scotland, the apple and the hazel. As previously discussed, these trees have important mythological assocations and high economic status. The hazel is particularly common throughout Ireland.[150]

Mention of the hazel occurs in Classical Gaelic verse from Scotland in the MacSween poem,[151] the address to Aonghus of Islay,[152] *'Foraois éigeas Innse Gall'*,[153] the address to Amlaoíbh of the Lennox,[154] and the elegy to Ruaidhrí Mòr MacLeòid.[155] Hazels trees are, however, surprisingly hardy survivors which adapted to Scottish conditions and can be found in all of the locations associated with these poems.[156] While it is hard to judge the relative 'density' of references to the hazel from the small corpus of Classical verse from a Scottish context that have survived, the references to the hazel in Scottish vernacular verse are in proportion to the actual physical presence of the trees and a much greater variety of tree types are named. That is to say, the vernacular verse seems to reflect a more realistic perception and description

149 Wilson MacLeod, personal communication.
150 Fergus Kelly 1997, p. 306.
151 Donald Meek 1997, §20.
152 *IBP*, poem 45, §28.
153 Ronald Black 1977, §13.
154 Brian Ó Cuiv 1968, §2 l. c.
155 John MacDonald 1955-8, §32.
156 Hugh Fife 1994, p. 118.

of a known landscape, rather than the repetition of the conventions of the idealised landscape engendered by the Classical style.

Inhabitants of the forest

Feelings about trees in general might be influenced, at least partially, by the kinds of creatures and beings which are represented in Gaelic tradition as inhabiting the forest. Trees might have a negative, sinister character if forests are represented as providing shelter for beings hostile to humankind, or a positive character if they are associated with creatures who have a symbiotic relationship with humankind. Conversely, if the forest is perceived as being a dark and ominous place, then it will be likely to be portrayed as a place harbouring dangerous and violent beings.

Of course, the animal kingdom has changed significantly in Scotland even since the early Middle Ages: the boar, the bear, and the wolf, for example, are all powerful creatures who pose a threat to humans and all of whom have become extinct during the current millennium.[157] Surviving historical accounts from the Middle Ages, such as a passage from John of Fordun's *Chronicles of the Scottish Nation* from the end of the fourteenth century, sometimes imply the existence of such beasts: 'Along the foot of these mountains are vast woods, full of stags, roe-deer, and other wild animals and beasts of various kinds...'.[158] Although these creatures can be found in Old Irish and Classical Gaelic sources, they very seldom appear in vernacular Scottish Gaelic sources. Most surviving Scottish Gaelic texts were created in times when the forests were relatively clear of such potential antagonists.

The forest inhabitant which appears most frequently in Gaelic tradition is the bird, who is almost invariably praised for his sweet singing, being likened to singers and bards.

> *Is binn cruit ceòlmhor is clàrsach cheart*
> *Is pìob le 'cuid dos*
> *Ach is binne na h-eòin a' seinn mu seach*
> *'S a' choille sin Chros.*[159]
>
> Melodious is a musical lyre and a good harp
> And a bagpipe with its drones
> But sweeter are the birds singing in turn

---

157 See Francis Thompson 1978, *passim*.
158 *ibid*, p. 5.
159 *BG*, l. 2303-6, 'Moladh Coille Chros', Eachann MacLeòid.

In that forest of Cross.

Rachainn leat troimh choill nan geugan
Far am bi na h-eòin a' sèisdrich...[160]

I would go with you through the forest
Where the birds sing their chorus...

They may not even be explicitly identified as birds, but be described in human terms:

Nach cluinn thu còisridh stòlda suairc
'S an doire ud shuas le 'n òranaibh
A' seinn cliù d'an Cruthadair fèin
Le laoidhean ceutach sòlasach
Air chorraibh an sgiath gun tàmh
Air meangain àrd nan ro chrann...[161]

Can't you hear the gentle, leisurely choir
In the grove up there with their songs
Singing praise to their own Creator
With beautiful hymns of solace
On the tips of their wings endlessly
On the high branches of the great trees...

There appears to have been a 'run' in Gaelic storytelling describing the coming of night by describing the singing of birds: *'Bha 'n latha 'falbh 's an oidhche 'tighinn is eunlaith bheag na coille craobhaich, dosraiche, dualaich a' gabhail mu bhun nam preas is mu bharr nan dos...* [The day was ending and the night was coming while the small birds of the branching, flourishing, twisting forest were singing about the base of the bushes and about the tops of the thickets...]'.[162]

So well known was this imagery that there are a number of proverbs and proverbial expressions that relate to the birds of the forest metaphorically: *'Is binn gach eun 'na dhoire fhèin* [Every bird is melodious in its own thicket]', *'Cho binn ri smeòrach air gèig* [As melodious as a mavis on a branch]'.[163]

It is somewhat surprising that wolves appear so seldom either in the 'panegyric code' of Gaelic poetry or in folk tale as they were still to be found in the Highlands of the early eighteenth century. There is a poem in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore* which most scholars agree relates to the Scottish

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160 *CG* V, p. 68, 'Seathan Mac Rìgh Èirinn'.
161 *BG*, l. 1221-6, 'Òran an t-Samhraidh', Uilleam Ros.
162 *PTWH* vol. 1, 'The Young King of Easaidh Ruadh', p. 103.
163 *NGP*, pp. 245, 150.

Parliament's Act of 1427-1428 to reward those who helped to exterminate the creature.[164] The poem describes tree-covered glens in particular as a primary habitat of the wolf: *'is lán gach gleann duilleach dhíobh* [every leafy glen is full of them]'.[165]

Hunting is a major preoccupation with heroic societies and quite a number of poems relate to the hunt and the paragon of game, the deer, sometimes under cover of woodland:

> *'S an eilid bhiorach as caol cos*
> *Nì fois fo dhuilleach ri teas.*[166]
>
> And the sharp-snouted hind, slender of foot
> Who rests in the heat under foliage.
>
> *Thug a' choille dhìot-s' an earb...*[167]
> The forest took the deer from you...

When the hound-companion of the young King of Easaidh Ruadh notices that it is time to eat, it makes a quick diversion into the forest to find their supper:

> *'A Rìgh,' ars an cù, 'chan fhaod thu bhith gun bhiadh.' Chaidh an cù 'staigh do'n choille, thug e 'mach beathaichean 's rinn iad am biadh gu tlachdmhor.*[168]
>
> 'O king,' said the hound, 'you cannot be without food.' The hound went into the forest, he brought out wild game and they made their meal with enjoyment.

It is no surprise that the hunter would follow his prey into its habitat. Thus, the hunter is also depicted as frequenting the forest:

> *Ann am fàsach na coille*
> *No 'n doire na gèige*
> *Bu tu nàmhaid a' choilich...*[169]
>
> In the wilderness of the forest
> Or in the grove of the branch
> You were the cock's enemy...
>
> *Is mòr a b'annsa bhith aig Griogair*
> *Air feadh coille is fraoich...*[170]

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164 *BA*, p. 293.
165 *ibid*, l. 1710, 'Beannuigh do theaghlach, a Thríonóid'.
166 *BG*, l. 6657-8, 'Òran na Comhachaig'.
167 *ibid*, l. 6831.
168 *PTWH* vol. I, p. 102.
169 *ODB*, l. 929-31, 'Òran do Chaiptean Donnchadh Caimbeul'.
170 *BG*, l. 6487-8, 'Cumha Ghriogair MhicGhriogair Ghlinn Sreith'.

Much more would I prefer to be Gregor's
In forest and heather...

Doireachan nan geug
Coill' anns am bi feur
'S foinneasach an sprèidh
Bhios a chòmhnaidh ann...[171]

Groves of boughs
Forest in which is wood
The drove is comely
Which dwells there...

The forest also hid outlaws and criminals, however. The proverbial expression *'fo choill* [under the forest]' was applied to someone living in hiding outside human society, usually a fugitive from the law. In this role, the forest symbolises an opposite pole to the law and order of human civilisation (more on this in the Chapter Conclusions).

There are a number of tales which tell of criminals hiding in the woods: 'The herdsmen went and kindled a fire near a tree in the wood as a signal to the one who went to steal...'[172] Fionn MacCumhaill himself had to be raised outside human society for protection against his father's enemies, who might have assassinated him. Fionn's fostermother asked Goban Saor:

> ...to make a house for her in one of the trees, on which, when the house was finished, no stroke of adze or axe (*buille thàil no thuaidh*) was to be seen, so that no one could tell there was a house there.[173]

The elegy for Sir John MacLean of Duart laments that his death was so devastating that his dependents have been forced to live as homeless soldiers for hire:

Is e chuir m' astar am maillead
Is mo shùilean an doillead
Bhith a' faicinn do chloinne
Is an luchd-fòghlaim is oilein
Bhith 'nan ceathairne choille...[174]

What has slowed my pace
And blinded my eyes
Is to see your children

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171 *ODB*, l. 2774-7, 'Moladh Beinn Dòbhrain'.
172 John G. Campbell 1895, p. 33.
173 John G. Campbell 1981, pp. 17-8. See also p. 24.
174 *BG*, l. 3730-4, 'Gaoir nam ban Muileach'.

And their teachers and learned men
Living as 'wood-kernes'...

One of the Jacobite soldiers who survived Culloden said of his life afterwards as a man on the run:

Tha mo leabaidh 's an fhraoch
Fo shileadh nan craobh
'S ged a tha mi 's a' choille...[175]

My bed is in the heather
Under the shedding of the trees
And though I am in the forest...

As the forest is a naturally sheltered and secluded place wherein private activities can take place, it is also a common image in Gaelic love poetry, the romantic background of courting, love-making and *gallant rendevzous*:

'S truagh nach robh mis' is tusa, 'fhleasgaich
Aig bun nan craobh fo bhàrr nam preasan.[176]

Pity that you and I, young man, aren't at
The base of the trees under the thick leaves...

Shiùbhlainn ro choill' mhòr nan geug leat...[177]
I'd traverse the great branchy forest with you...

Besides these 'natural' creatures, there are Gaelic traditions of some preternatural forest dwellers. An unidentified spirit calls out to one tale character from the woods: *'Mu mheadhan oidhche, ghoir spiorad os a chionn anns a' choillidh, a thuirt, "A Dhòmhnuill Chaoil! Fàg an ceann!"* [About midnight, a spirit above him in the woods called out "Slender Donald! leave the head!"].'[178]

One of the more interesting tales is that of the spirits called Dàibhidh and Mòr:

> The mountain stretch at Corri-Dho which is known as *Taigh Mòr na Seilg* [The Big House of the Hunt] was the haunt of a male goblin known as Dàibhidh and of a female spirit named Mòr. These two strongly objected to the right which the Glen Urquhart tenantry had of grazing their cattle in summer on the shielings of Corri-Dho, and they were repeatedly seen driving away the Glen Urquhart herds. At last Dàibhidh was so thoroughly roused that he pulled a great fir tree up by the roots and, with the assistance of Mòr, chased the Urquhart men and their bestial for many miles, until he

175 *HSFF*, p. 266, 'Tha mo leabaidh 'san fhraoch'.
176 *HF* ii, l. 507-8.
177 *HF* ii, l. 1166.
178 J. G. MacKay 1914, p. 74.

sent them over the Glenmoriston march beyond Achnagoneran. Dàibhidh's words on the occasion are still remembered:

Is leam-s' Doire-Dhamh is Doire-Dhàibhidh
Is Boirisgidh bhuidh' nan alltan
Is Ceann a' Chnoc mòr le fiodh is le fàsaich
A bhodaichibh dubh daithte, togaibh oirbh!

Doire-Dhamh and Doire-Dhàibhidh are mine
And yellow Boirisgidh of the streams
And wide Ceanacroc with its woods and pastures
Go away, you black and singed wags!

And the Urquhart carles did take themselves away, and never again showed face in Corri-Dho.[179]

In summary, although the typical forest dweller is the melodious bird, and the noble hunter's prey is to be found amongst the cover of trees, there are a few other denizens which humans would likely fear: the wolf, the outlaw, malicious spirits, and so on. There are dangers as well as benefits to be found in the forest.

We might ask, however, if the forest was more dangerous to the Scottish Gaelic mind than the neighbourhood *lochan*, home of the *each-uisge*, or nearby hillock, where the capricious *sìthe* resided? There is indeed a great deal of ambiguity and unpredictability in nature as a whole, whether it be the forest or the field.

The Caledonian Forest in Gaelic Tradition

The latest generation of scholars has emphasised the lack of evidence for an ancient, widespread woodland in Scotland popularly referred to as the "Great Caledonian Forest" or the "Ancient Caledonian Forest". In recent articles discussing ancient tree cover,[180] modern scientists are working with data such as pollen counts to build a picture suggesting that the forest was never as extensive, as dense nor as recently felled as the persistent folk tradition has long declared.

> In the aftermath of the last Ice Age, some type of forest cover indeed covered the Highlands from edge to edge, apart from the high tops, though pine and oak did not grow on the islands and Flow country of the north, where such cover as there was

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[179] William MacKay 1914, pp. 425-6. The original gives *Ceann a' chnoc mhòr*, but the English translation is 'great Ceanacroc'. I have therefore stuck with the sense of the English translation and altered the adjective accordingly.

[180] A. Tipping 1994 is a good and currently up-to-date example.

> consisted largely of birch and hazel. There is, however, no evidence that even in Roman times, 2000 years ago, the forest was still anything like this extent... Just how much of the original forest cover of Scotland had vanished by the time of the birth of Christ is hard to say, but very possibly considerably more than half of it.[181]

In attempting to demolish the myth of the Great Caledonian Forest, Smout promises us that the enlightenment resulting from scientific scrutiny and objective analysis will cast away the irrationality of such shadowy myths:

> The origin of this historical theory [of the demise of the Great Caledonian Forest], with its overtones of a lost Eden destroyed by man's greed, particularly his recent greed, is not hard to discern... Nevertheless, it is high time we reconsidered this sketch in the critical light of modern archaeological and historical scholarship, and discussed some of the sources that can throw light on the problem.[182]

What is seldom recognised or addressed, however, is that this folk memory must tell us something important about the significance of these forests in traditional Scottish ontology. In other words, for such a myth to be so wide-spread, ancient and tenacious, it must express a meaningful Truth from the perspective of those communities who believed and transmitted it, regardless of scientific 'truth'. Smout has not made a space for the cultural anthroplogist and the human ecologist in his scheme of enlightenment. Hugh Cheape has made the observation:

> Tradition is consistent and widespread over the Highlands that woods were once extensive and no longer are so... the traditions themselves serve to provide an insight into a symbolic role for woodland in the culture of the Gaelic Highlands... They indicate that the woods were inseparably part of the cultural heritage of the area and that there was an innate understanding of environmental issues since the loss of trees was interpreted as a disaster and an upsetting of the natural order.[183]

There are a number of possibilities for the origin of the belief in the Great Caledonian Forest. It may have been a folk elaboration based on learned Classical sources which make vague references to a Caledonian Forest:

> This suggests that it was the period of initial progress [by the Romans] through the forests of the upper Forth which determined this picture and brought the concept and name of the Caledonian Forest into being; and this moment of contemplation of a dense indeterminately large forest to the north-west was what fixed the literary stereotype...[184]

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181 Chris Smout 1997, pp. 5-6, basing this summary on the information in A. Tipping 1994.
182 *ibid*, p. 5.
183 Hugh Cheape 1993, p. 54.
184 Basil Clarke 1969, p. 193.

It is possible, on the other hand, that there was a folk memory of clearing a wide expanse of woodlands. From the survival of P-Celtic place-names (many of them relating to woods) in Scotland and the signs of bilingualism in the process of Gaelicisation[185] alone there appears to be a great deal of continuity of population. There are hints that the tradition of a large continous expanse of forest appears in a number of early Welsh and Irish tales,[186] and such traditions certainly exist in later local traditions.

On the other hand, the traditions may simply be an explanation invented by people finding the remains of trees in mosses in many locations throughout Scotland, trying to create a plausible explanation of their origin.

It is fairly late before we find references to the forest in specifically Scottish sources. The early struggles of the Romans against the Caledonii were placed by Boece in his history of 1526 in the Caledonian Forest, north from the Carse of Stirling and westwards.[187] Bishop Leslie, c. 1550, placed the Caledonian Forest in the Tor Wood south of Stirling and extended it into Lochaber.[188] John Major, in his history, characterises the Highlanders as 'born in the forests and mountains of the north... they are in the mountains and dwellers in forests...',[189] although it is not clear how much this reflects the true topography of his time and to what degree it is simply a Lowland stereotype of the Highlands as a wilderness area.

Although he does not talk about how widely trees were believed to grow in general in Scotland, Martin Martin does mention that Skye once enjoyed dense tree cover:

> Some object that the Druids could not be in the Isles, because no Oaks grow there. To which I answer, That in those days Oaks did grow there, and to this day there be Oaks growing in some of them...
> This Isle hath antiently been cover'd all over with Woods...[190]

There are numerous allusions in MacFarlane's *Geographical Collections* and the *Old Statistical Account of Scotland* to certain areas having been heavily forested in the recent past.[191] Pennant records several traditions from

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185 See William J. Watson 1926, Chapters XI and XII.
186 Basil Clarke 1969, p. 199.
187 *ibid*, pp. 194-5.
188 *ibid*, p. 195.
189 John Major 1892, pp. 48, 49.
190 Martin Martin 1716, pp. 105, 142.
191 See Mark Anderson 1967, especially pp. 80-82, 493-4.

northern Scotland which indicate that woods were believed to have declined greatly in the recent past:

> ...Cromarty, now a country almost destitute of trees; yet in the time of James V, was covered in timber and over-run with wolves.[192]
> ...the tradition is that all these Highlands were then forest and wood, but now there is scarcely any wood.[193]

Sir Aeneas Mackintosh, writing before 1783, records a similar memory of a past when trees were much more dense in Strathdearn:

> In Mary Queen of Scot's time, this place was covered with Oak woods, which harboured many of these Animals who came for the Acorns found here...
> Most probably all the plain on which Moy-hill stands, was at one time cover'd with wood and swamp which have gradually been removed by the wood being cut and Ditches made through it...[194]

The above examples demonstrate that the belief in a vast ancient woodland was established in Gaelic tradition before the popularising works of antiquaries such as Stewart of Garth, Ramsay and Logan. Many more place-specific examples may be found in local histories, as some of the following examples, from Badenoch, Lismore, Skye and Arran, illustrate:

> *A' Choille Mhòr* — the Great Wood — which was spoken of with bated breath as a remnant of the traditional forest that in prehistoric times covered the land...[195]

> According to tradition there were long ago only one, or at most, two points from which anyone in the interior of the Island could catch a glimmer of the sea [on account of the thickness of forest].[196]

> There is a persistent tradition that East Trotternish was deeply wooded in the no great distant past. This belief is strengthened by the remains of huge tree roots, found deeply embedded in the peat mosses, and acorns are often turned up, showing that the oak flourished in remote times. With many of the old people the belief is a certainty. Such being the case, the destruction may have been carried out by ravaging Norsemen setting fire to the wood. In a letter received from an old friend in Australia, the following occurs. "When my great grandfather's great grand-father, Angus Nicolson, Marrishadder, used to visit his son in Grealine (a mile distant) he could only see sky above him at one spot for the density of the wood. When the cows were let out in the morning, they were not seen again till they came for their calves at *Tràth eadraidh* (milking time)." The great Caledonian Forest may have existed in Skye as well as on the mainland.[197]

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192 Thomas Pennant 1774, p. 152.
193 Barbara Crawford 1995, p. 12 (from Thomas Pennant 1774, p. 344).
194 Sir Aeneas Mackintosh 1892, pp. 2, 6.
195 Thomas Sinton 1910, p. 84.
196 Iain Carmichael, p. 1.
197 William Mackenzie 1934, p. 31.

> The existence of this industry [iron] is a further testimony to the considerable growth of natural wood that must once have flourished in the island. Indeed, Arran is said on this account to have been known as the Black Forest.[198]

The belief is sometimes expressed in poetry as well, as in this lament for the fallen state of Morvern:

> *An toiseach mun deachaidh d' àiteach'*
> *Bha thu 'd fhàsaichean gun duine*
> *Gura b' ainm dhuit an Tìr Choillteach*
> *Ged 'se a' Mhòr-bheinn a tha 'n diugh ort.*[199]
>
> In the beginning, before you were settled
> You were a humanless wilderness
> Your name was the Forested Land
> But today your name is the Great Mountain.

Dubh-Ghiuthais and the Burning of the Forest

It is beyond the remit of this thesis to examine the actual causes of deforestation in Scotland, which in reality would have been a long, complex process, involving such activities as clearance for agriculture, piecemeal erosion by goats (an animal common in pre-eighteenth century Gaeldom infamous for its appetite), salt-making, ship-building, and so on. More relevant to my research is the explanation offered by tradition. This differs somewhat in different areas.

In one unpublished tale about the exploits of Robert the Bruce in the region of the Lennox and south-west Perthshire, it is stated *'Bha aig an àm, Srath-Dubhuisg, Gleann Falach agus mòran de Shrathaibh 'nan aon ghiùbhsaich mhòir...* [At that time, Srath-Dubhuisg, Glen Falloch and much of Strathfillan was a huge pine forest]'.[200] Another tale recorded by John Dewar (although corroborated by others)[201] attributes the loss of these woodlands to the attempt to exterminate raiding Athol-men:

> *Tràth smaointich Donnachadh MacPhàrlain gun robh na h-Atholaich 'nan cadal, chaidh e agus bhuain e goid is shnìomh e iad agus chaidh e gu sàmhach is cheangail [e] dorsan nan taighean seilge air an taobh a-mach agus chuir e teine ris na taighean. Bha anns an àm sin Srath-Dubhuisg, Gleann Falach, Bràigh GhlinnUrcha, Sraithibh*

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198 W. M. Mackenzie 1914, p. 123.

199 Iain Thornber 1983, p. 17, 'Do'n Mhorbhairne'.

200 *Dewar MS*, Vol. V(a), p. 183.

201 Such as Rev. H. S. Winchester, pp. 8-9, although as a minister in Arrochar shortly after John Dewar's time, he may have had access to John Dewar's MSS. Unidentified MSS are said to have been in the possession of Rev. James Dewar of Arrochar, who may have been related to John Dewar.

Fhaolainn re deich mile 'na aon Ghiuthsaich mhòir le coille ghiuthais a-nuas Gleann Dubhghlais gu ruig CoireGhrogain agus bha na taighean seilge anns a' Choille Ghiuthais agus tràth chaidh teine a chuir ris na taighean, chuir na taighean teine ris a choille agus chaidh na bha' n sin de choille a losgadh.

An ath latha thuirt Donnachadh MacPhàrlain ri athair, 'A Dhuine, cia mar a bhiodh Srath-Dubhuisg an-diugh nam biodh teine air a chuir ris na taighean seilg an-raoir'. Thuig MacPhàrlain gun robh Donnachadh a mhac air a bhith a' deanamh rudeigin dona agus thuirt e, 'O A Dhonnachaidh na Dunaich, A Dhonnachaidh na Dunaich, an do loisg thu Srath-Dubhuisg?' Agus tuille na dheigh sin b'e an t-ainm a theirte ris 'Donnachadh dubh na dunaich a loisg Srath-Dubhuisg'.[202]

When Duncan MacFarlane thought that the Athol-men were sleeping, he went and he reaped withes and he twisted them together and he went silently and he tied together the outsides of the hunting-lodge doors and he set the lodges on fire. At that time, Strath-Dubhuisg, Glenfalloch, upper Glenorchy and Strath Fillan were all one big pine forest ten miles long all the way from Glen Douglas to Coire-Ghrogain and the hunting-lodges were in the Pine Forest and when the houses were set on fire, the houses set the wood on fire, and all that there was of that forest was burnt.

The next day Duncan MacFarlane said to his father, 'Sir, how would Strath-Dubhuisg be today if the hunting-lodges had been set on fire last night?'. MacFarlane inferred that his son Duncan had been doing something bad and he said, 'O Duncan of the Disaster, O Duncan of the Disaster, did you burn Srath-Dubhuisg?' And ever after that the name he was called was 'Black-haired Duncan of the Disaster who burnt Strath-Dubhuisg'.

The reaction to the news of the fire, and the name of shame put on Donnachadh, confirms that the loss of the woods was considered a terrible disaster.

Traditions in Badenoch also give a legendary explanation involving a historical character, Mary Queen of Scots:

> The tradition of the country has it that the wicked Queen Mary set fire to the old Badenoch forest. She felt offended at her husband's pride in the great forest — he had asked her once on his home return how his forests were before he asked about her. So she came north, took her station up on the top of Sron-na-Bàruinn — the Queen's Ness — above Glenfeshie, and there gave orders to set the woods on fire. And her orders were obeyed. The Badenoch forest was set burning, and the Queen, Nero-like, enjoyed the blaze from her point of vantage.[203]

By far the oldest and most widespread tradition, however, has it that the forests were burnt by the witch-daughter of the King of Norway who was given the name *Dubh-Ghiuthais* [the Black of Pine] because she became blackened with the soot of the pines that she destroyed with fire.

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[202] NLS MS 50220 (Campbell of Islay's collection). This is a close variant of that printed in John Dewar 1964, p. 105.

[203] Alexander MacBain 1922, p. 191.

The first reference to the tradition of Viking blame appears in a 1726 report on Cannisbay parish which states:

> to this day the roots of firs, oaks and birch are digged up almost in all our mosses, which were burnt by the Danes, as the common tradition goes.[204]

It is not clear whether or not this is a reference to the story of *Dubh-Ghiuthais*, or a rationalisation of it. The Vikings are also mentioned in a similar manner by the Rev. John Buchanan in his 1793 book on the Western Hebrides:

> ...it is evident that there was once plenty of [wood] all over the islands: for the roots and trunks of large trees are found in deep mosses, bearing unequivocal impressions of fire; which make the people say, that the Norwegians burnt the wood when they were obliged to retreat from the Scottish islands and sea-coasts to their native Scandinavia.[205]

The outline to the *Dubh-Ghiuthais* tale is as follows.[206] The King of Lochlann became jealous that Scotland's forest rivalled his own. He sent his daughter, who had been well trained in the *Sgoil Dhubh* (the black arts of witchcraft), to go to destroy Scotland's forests, which she did by flying over them and dropping fire into them. Although malicious to the trees, she had a soft spot for animals, and a wise man suggested that the noise of distressed animals would cause her to drop to earth where she could be shot and killed. The mother animals — only cows in some variants, or all sorts of beasts in others — were separated from their offspring and a terrible cacophony ensued, which earned the sympathy and concern of *Dubh-Ghiuthais* and thus made her vulnerable to the attack of the hunter who killed her. Most versions are localised so that such and such a place is pointed out to be the site of her grave.

There are several variants which depart from this outline considerably. In one variant she travelled in a glass apparatus with which she would set the forests alight, perhaps a semi-scientific rationalisation that she used a lens to set the fires.[207] In another variant, rather than being tricked to come down to earth, the mere utterance of a blessing caused her to lose her power.[208] A

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204 Mark Anderson 1967, p. 32.
205 Rev. John Buchanan 1793, p. 24.
206 This outline follows Alan Bruford 1967, p. 25.
207 George Henderson 1910, p. 278.
208 *ibid*, pp. 278-9 and Rev. C. M. Robertson 1905, p. 279.

Sutherland variant has transformed the tale into a confrontation between a dragon and St. Gilbert.[209]

The tale of *Dubh-Ghiuthais* has structural similarities to the Irish tale of Mis and Dubh Ruis, which only survives in a late and condensed form.[210] In this tale, a foreign invader has his hopes thwarted of conquering Ireland when he is killed at the Battle of Ventry. His daughter goes insane when she drinks the blood from his corpse and, assuming the characteristics of an animal and moving like the wind [*'ritheach mar an ngaoith'*], she hunts and consumes man or beast on Sliabh Mis, turning it into a deserted wilderness. After a long reign of terror, Dubh Ruis, through symbolic acts of 'domestication' emphasising traditional female gender roles, brings her back within the fold of human civilisation.

In both tales, the daughter of a hostile foreign king wreaks havoc, creates a wilderness and is finally conquered with some device related to the animal world. In the case of *Dubh-Ghiuthais*, sympathy for the animal world was exploited, while Mis was forced to reject her animal personality and regain her human character. There also appears to be a similarity in their means of travel and in the names *Dubh-Ghiuthais* and *Dubh Ruis*. It may be significant that one of the meanings of the second element in the name of the earlier character, *ros*, is 'a wood or copse'. It is possible, though not verifiable, that the Highland *Dubh-Ghiuthais* tale owes something to this earlier Irish tale.

The *Dubh-Ghiuthais* tale has a very wide occurrence in the Highlands. Dr. Alan Bruford, in an article about Scottish Gaelic witch stories, lists examples from the Hebrides, Inverness-shire, Ross-shire and Sutherland.[211] Although the details may not be exactly the same, the Vikings are also held culpable for similar destructions in Ireland: 'the Vikings are cited as being responsible, inter alia, for the burning and destruction of the woods of Dú Chaocháin'.[212]

Scientists are now piecing together a picture of woodland erosion that suggests that the process began very long ago for very mundane reasons, mostly the advance of agriculture (although other factors may be involved).

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209 John F. Campbell and George Henderson 1911, pp. xxii-xxiii.

210 Edited in Brian ó Cuív 1954. I owe the observation of the structural similarities to Professor William Gillies.

211 Alan Bruford 1967, p. 25-6.

212 Séamas Ó Catháin and Patrick O'Flanagan 1975, p. 74.

Why did the Gaelic community resort to dramatic and mythological tales to explain the disappearance of the forests?

The Vikings did appear to have a 'scorched earth' policy in their strategy for conquest and perhaps these tales are an elaboration of folk memory. Many malicious fires are related in *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* [The War of the Gael with the Gall], and the Vikings themselves boast of their destructive blazes, as in this excerpt from *Heimskringla*:

> In Lewis Isle with fearful blaze
> The house-destroying fire plays
> To hills and rocks the people fly
> Fearing all shelter but the sky...
> From Islay smoke rose heaven-high
> Whirling up from the flashing blaze...[213]

In a recent essay on the political and economic roles of the Vikings in Northern Scotland, Barbara Crawford makes the observations:

> There was one very important and obvious resource in Ross which was vital to the Viking way of life and their success in raiding and trading: Timber...In western Scotland the Vikings earned an unenviable reputation for destroying and burning the woods. Although the traditions about this can hardly be used as historical evidence about the process of reduction of Scotland's natural forest cover, we should perhaps be prepared to reconsider the Viking requirements which may have contributed to the decline of this wonderful resource.[214]

It may also be significant that Norse tradition regarding early settlement in Northern Scotland records the nickname of a man called Torf, so called because he was the first to exploit peat as a fuel source, presumably because timber was no longer readily available from his day onwards.[215]

Regardless of the historical facts, the Vikings are significant in Gaelic ontology as the archetypal enemy. By placing the blame on a particular dramatic act of destruction, sense can be made of an otherwise complex process. It is also advantageous in relieving the Gaels of the burden of guilt for destroying an otherwise highly regarded natural asset. Likewise, patriarchal Hebrew society could explain the loss of the Paradise of Eden by the original sin of a woman, Eve:

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213 A. P. Smyth 1984, p. 141.
214 Barbara Crawford 1995, pp. 11, 21.
215 A. P. Smyth 1984, p. 154.

> The memory of the Fall (regardless of the religious conventions that encrust it) reflects the self-conscious recognition by sedentary agriculturalists that the *green world* from which the human species had come was irretrievably lost.[216]

In a survey of the role of Vikings in Gaelic tradition, Ó Giolláin comes to the conclusions that the Vikings:

> ...took over the role of various mythical invaders of Ireland who created the landscape and instituted various customs and techniques...[217]

As evidence for the Viking blame is old and very widespread, I believe this to be the oldest account of the destruction of the forest. In Badenoch and Perthshire, where Viking impact was sparse and Lowland society made an impression upon Gaelic society, more historically oriented tales were devised to explain the charred remains to be found in the peat.

We might compare this Scottish account for the destruction of forests with Irish tradition in which the predecessors of the Gaels are responsible for clearing the forests to make plains for agriculture (although this also has important cosmogenic implications). An account in the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (LGE) gives Partholon credit for clearing trees and creating four plains,[218] while another credits Nemed with clearing twelve plains.[219] (Keating, however, claims that twenty-four slaves of the sons of Mílidh cleared twenty-four plains[220] and the *Metrical Dindshenchas* credits the slaves of Mílidh.[221])

The *LGE* account is summarised in verse by Tadhg Dall when he asks Ráth Oiligh for an account of its history:

> *(Ráth Oiligh)*
> *Do bhí mé ag iomhcur m' anshóidh*
> *san tírse ar dteacht Phárthalóin*
> *gan lios mbán, gan chloidhe gclach*
> *acht lán do dhoire dharach*
> *(Am Filidh)*
> *Créad é an riocht i raibhe sibh*
> *i gcomhfhlaitheas Clann Neimhidh?...*
> *(Ráth Oiligh)*
> *Do bhádhus im' mhìn mhuighe*
> *gan fhoithre, gan fhiodhbhuidhe...*
> *Níor fágbhadh fréamh i dtalmhain*
> *dom fhiodhbhaidh chlaoin chorrabhlaigh —*

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216 Max Oelschaeger 1991, p. 61.
217 Diarmuid Ó Giolláin 1994-5, p. 169.
218 Section IV, §214; 220.
219 Section V, §252.
220 *Foras Feasa Ar Éirinn* I §XXIII, p. 102-3.
221 Edward Gwynn 1913 (vol. 3), pp. 198-9.

beag teacht mo shaorchoille ó shin —
le neart naomhChloinne Neimhidh...
Maith atá sí ina suidhe
idir fhairrge is fhiodhbhuidhe...
Sléibhte míne ameasg a feadh
cnuic corra ar cúl na sléibhteadh;
fiodh collbhuidhe fan gclár bhfionn
fál tonnmhuire 'na thimchioll.[222]

(Oileach Castle)
I was bearing my misfortune
In this land upon the coming of Partholon
With no enclosed meadow or stone rampart
But full of oak thickets.
(The Poet)
In what condition were you
During the reign of the Children of Nemhedh?
(Oileach Castle)
I was a smooth plain
Without woods, without woods...
Not a root was left in the ground
of my arching fruit-tree woods —
little has my noble forest grown —
from the might of Nemhedh's holy people...
Well is it situated
Between the ocean and the woods...
Smooth moors amidst its forests
peaked hills behind the moors
a hazel-yellow wood by the fair plain
a billowing sea as a hedge around it.

Thus, although spaces in the forest have been cleared for agriculture and human settlement, the symbolic importance of trees and the forest is asserted by boasting of its location between ocean and woods, important not only as resource bases but in terms of Gaelic symbolic ideology.

There is a deep ambiguity between the need for human and agricultural space — land, that is, free of trees — and the desire for the beauty and material and spiritual richness that trees provide. 'Since Mesolithic times, human progress had depended upon grubbing up and demolishing trees with which much of the land had originally been covered.'[223] The clearance of the forest to provide space for human endeavour is a necessary struggle (in a post-Paleolithic *modus operandi*, anyway), but this achievement is both heroic and tragic.

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222 Eleanor Knott 1922, poem 28, §7, 8, 9, 10, 34, 35.
223 Keith Thomas 1983, p. 192.

The Image of the Tree in Immigrant Poetry

Piecing together a picture of the attitudes regarding woodland cover and forest clearance is very difficult because of how long ago this occurred in Scotland. Gaeldom itself, of course, was tranformed by this change in landscape and the change to pastoralism and agricultural which the new terrain allowed, not to mention other cultural developments: Christianity, feudalism, etc. Notwithstanding these differences, it may be advantageous to analyse the comments made by the Gaels who immigrated from the Gàidhealtachd during the Clearances to the North American forests.

With few exceptions, the early waves of Gaels leaving for America saw trees as representing the natural wealth that would feed and nourish them:

Tha sinn a' dol dh'America
Far nach bi cùram eile oirnn
Cho fad 's a mhaireas coille dhuinn
An Eilean Nova Scotia...[224]

We're going to America
Where we'll never have another care
As long as the forest lasts us
In Nova Scotia island...

Meòirean chraobh air lùbadh ann
Le ùbhlan glas' is dearga...[225]

Limbs of trees (are) bent there
By (the weight of) green and red apples...

Gheibh sinn cnothan agus ùbhlan
Air lùiseadh air bharr gach crann
Mòran mheasan milis, cùbhraidh...[226]

We'll have nuts and apples
Loosened on the end of each branch
Many sweet fragrent fruits...

Very seldom is there a note of recognition, at least in the poetry, of the great toil in store for them:

Thèid sinn a dh'America
'S gur h-e ar deireadh falbh ann;
Nì sinn fearann de'n choille

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224 'Illean Bithibh Sunndach', traditional.
225 Colin Chisholm 1883, p. 224, 'Théid sinn a dh'America'. See also Margaret MacDonell 1982, p. 62.
226 Colin Chisholm 1883, p. 234.

Far nach teirig airgead.[227]

We'll go to America
It is our destiny to go there
We'll make pastures of the forest
Where money won't run out.

Gheibh sinn fearann is àiteach
Anns na fàsaichean thall
Bidh na coilltean 'gan rùsgadh
Ged bhiodh cùinneadh oirnn gann.[228]

We'll get land and a steading
In the wildernesses over yonder
The forests will be laid bare
Although we won't have much money.

Tales had, no doubt, come back to Scotland of the conflicts with the natives of the American forests when immigrants moved into their lands. A poet of the late nineteenth century in treeless Lewis bewails his people who have been made to leave their homes to be sent:

Air seachran 's na fàsaichean dorcha
Measg allmharach borba na fàs-choill'
A' tilgeil an saighdean gu millteach...[229]

Wandering in the dark wildernesses
Among barbarous foreigners of the wild-wood
Who cast their arrows destructively...

Once they arrive the pioneers are overwhelmed by the scale of the herculean task of clearing the dense forest to make room for farms and animal holdings:

Mun dèan mi àiteach 's mun tog mi barr ann
Is a' choille ghàbhaidh 'chur as a bonn
Le neart mo ghàirdein gum bi mi sàraichte...[230]

Before I can plough and raise a crop there
And root out the dangerous forest
By the strength of my arms I will be worn out...

Gur diombach dhe mo chàirdean mi
Na thàinig romham fhèin
Nach d' innis cor an àite dhomh

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227 Margaret MacDonell 1982, p. 62, 'Théid sinn a dh'America'.
228 *ibid*, p. 116, 'An Imrich', Rory Roy MacKenzie.
229 Donald Meek 1995, poem 15, 'Òran Luchd an Spòrs', Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn.
230 *BG*, l.389-391, 'A' Choille Ghruamach'.

'S mar shàraich e iad fhèin.
A' dol tro choill' an fhàsaich seo
Gun chàil ach rathad blaze;
O 's muladach an t-àite seo...
'S gun dad aig fear ri faotainn
Ach le 'shaothair as a ghèig...[231]

I'm displeased with my relations
Who arrived before me
Who didn't tell me the state of this land
And how it wore them out.
Travelling through this forest wilderness
Without anything but a blazed trail
Oh, this place is gloomy...
And there's nothing for a man to get
But what he must wrestle with a branch for...

Not everyone was so discouraged by their pioneering experiences, however. Mìcheal Mòr Mac Dhòmhnaill, who is said to have lived alone as the only 'white man' for a time amongst the natives and is credited with writing the oldest commentary in Gaelic about Cape Breton, praises the land and the trees:

O 's cùbhraidh smùidean
A bhios dhe na taighean siùcair
Craobhan troma dlùth dhaibh
'S iad gun mheang, 's iad gun mheang, O.
'N àm an fhoghair b'e mo roghainn
A bhith tadhal gus an taghadh;
'S gum b'e 'm baothair nach tug oidheirp
Air bhith ann, air bhith ann.[232]

Oh, sweet are the puffs of smoke
That come from the houses of sugar
Dense, heavy trees
And they are flawless, flawless, Oh.
In the autumn it is my wish
To be visiting them to inspect them;
And he is a buffoon who didn't take the chance
To be here, to be here.

Indeed, once the pioneer communities had endured the initial hardships, they again saw the trees as a source of natural wealth and beauty:

Gur ann an America tha sinn an dràsd'

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231 Margaret MacDonell 1982, p. 120, 'Gearan air America', c. 1830.

232 *ibid*, p. 60. This source translates *gun mheang* as 'without branches', which seems very unlikely to me in praise to trees. Exactly what the phrase *taighean siùcair* [houses of sugar] means is not entirely clear. While on the one hand it may be referring to the production of maple syrup, it is likely (especially as similar reference is made in the next quote) that sugar represents 'food of the wealthy'.

Fo dhubhar na coille nach teirig gu bràth
Nuair dh'fhalbhas an dubhlachd 's a thionndaidheas am blàths
Bidh cnothan, bidh ùbhlan 's bidh an siùcar a' fàs...[233]

We are now in America
Under the dark of the never-ending woods
When the winter ends and the warmth returns
Nuts, apples and sugar will be growing...

Na craobhan lùbte làn de dh'ùbhlan
Torrach, sùghail, uaine;
Plums 's peuran, grapes is caorainn...
An uair a' siud mi leis an tuaigh
A thoirt a-nuas nan craobhan
Bha 'n obair trom, ach dh'èireadh sunnd
Nuair chìteadh ceann dhiubh 'g aomadh...
Bidh na stocan gu bhi loisgte
Ann an sia no seachd de bhliadhnan
'S tha pàircean fada, rèidh
'S an sprèidh 'nam measg ag ionaltradh.[234]

The trees bent over, full of apples
Fertile, sappy, verdant;
Plums, pears, grapes and berries...
When I set out with the axe
To take down the trees
The work was hard but it was pleasing
To see one of their heads bowing...
The stumps can be burnt
In six or seven years
And the fields are long and level
And the cattle are grazing in them.

Here too, amongst the Gaels who emigrated to the heavily wooded land of North America, the ambiguity of woodlands is apparent. While they are the source of beauty, foods and natural resources, they are also an obstacle to overcome for a society which has been, for the most part, out of the hunting-gathering mode of the Paleolithic Age for thousands of years.[235] Once a foothold had been carved out of the woodland and a livelihood secured, the

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[233] *ibid*, p. 42, 'Dean Cadalach Sàmhach'.

[234] *ibid*, pp. 142,144, by Eoghan Mac Corcadail, before 1870 in Ontario. '*An uair a' siud mi...*' are the words given in the source. It is unclear to me whether this is the preposition *siud*, whether it is some miswritten or misprinted form of the verb *siuthad* or *siubhal*, or another verb altogether. The most likely suggestion, from Mr. Ronald Black, is that *chaidh* was the intended verb.

[235] Societies retain vestiges of previous types of economies, of course; a primarily agricultural society will seldom abandon all hunting and gathering. Differing economies may co-exist, and the participants in each mode may differ according to class, age, gender, season, etc. (See Max Oelschlaeger 1991, pp. 25-7, 37, 47.) Nonetheless, it is clear that Gaelic civilisation has been predominantly pastoral-agricultural throughout the historical period.

woodlands could be appreciated as a symbiotic feature rather than a hindrance or threat.

Sentiments about woods

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, there is very little explicit discussion in Gaelic tradition about how people felt about trees themselves. Trees most often appear in association with something else: the tree which indicates the fate of a dynasty, the trees which indicate that the chieftain enjoys a good reign, the trees which were felled as an act of vandalism by Hanoverians, etc. There is some evidence, however, in poetry and proverb, which indicates the prevailing Gaelic sensibilities about trees, especially when the assumptions about the old Gaelic world were failing and giving way to an uncertain future.

A comparison with developments within English society provides some useful hints. In the eighteenth century, English sensibilities about nature in general were becoming more 'genteel' due to the conquest that science and technology afforded.[236]

> As the woodlands shrank in area they ceased to terrify and became instead valued sources of pleasure and inspiration... As for forests, they were now 'romantic'... Yet there is no doubt that poetic regrets for the felling of old trees reflected a widespread and genuine current of feeling.[237]

Whether Gaelic poetic sensibilities were affected by such trends is difficult to assess, but the first evidence of praise of woodlands for their own sake and of the lament for cleared woods comes from the eighteenth century.

The letters of the English soldier Burt, written in the 1720's, demonstrate that he found the native love of the Highland landscape puzzling: 'And, certainly, it is the Deformity of the Hills that makes the Natives conceive of their naked Straths and Glens, as of the most beautiful Objects in Nature.'[238]

Eachann MacLeòid, floruit 1750, composed a poem in praise of a wood in Morar in which themes also present in European nature poetry appear: woods as places of inherent spirituality[239] and woods as restorers of health and natural balance:

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236 Keith Thomas 1983, p. 301.
237 *ibid*, pp. 212, 213, 214.
238 Edmund Burt 1876, vol II, p. 37.
239 Keith Thomas 1983, p. 215.

M' ionmhainn m' annsachd is mo thlachd
Dh'an tug mi toirt;
Chan àicheidhinn do'n chlèir nach dèanainn stad
'S a' choille sin Chros...

Ged bhiodh tu gun radharc sùl, gun lùth do chos
'Ad dheòiridh bochd
Nam bu mhath leat do shlàinte philleadh air ais
Ruig coille Chros.

Aig àilleachd a luis is mìsleachd a mios
Is aig feabhas a blais
Chan iarradh tu shòlas nam bitheadh tu glic
Ach coille Chros...[240]

My beloved, my dear and my joy
To which I have given esteem
I would not protest to the clergy that I wouldn't make a stop
In that wood of Cross.

Though you be without sight and without strength of your feet,
A poor wanderer
If you want your wholeness to return
Go to Coille Chros.

By the beauty of its herb and sweetness of its fruit
And by the excellence of its taste
You couldn't want for better comfort, if you would be wise
Than Coille Chros.

It is not necessary to resort to outside cultural influence to explain the emergence of a genre of poetry about nature in Gaelic tradition. Most Gaelic poetry was highly ephemeral unless it implicated people or institutions that would have wished to record and preserve it and hence a great deal of the breadth of Gaelic vernacular verse must have been lost before the efforts of antiquarians to record it during the eighteenth century.

A document describing the natives of Kerry, published in 1756, relates a curious ritual of the composition of nature poetry:

> There is a custom among the country people, to enjoin everyone that passes this mountain, to make some verses to its honour, otherwise they affirm, that whoever attempts to pass it without versifying, must meet with mischance...[241]

The *Dinnshenchas* literary tradition, although written by the professional classes for the preservation of learned legendary lore, could have also

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240 *BG*, l. 2299-2302, 2311-2318.

241 *Antient and Present State of the county of Kerry* by Charles Smith, quoted in Máire MacNeill 1962, p. 137.

provided a model and an impetus for the development of place-centred poetry of description in the vernacular folk tradition.

There are examples, however, of eighteenth and nineteenth century Scottish Gaelic nature poetry which were influenced by Ossianic and Romantic poetry. Domhnall MacLeòid (*Dòmhnall nan Òran*), whose book of Gaelic poetry appeared in 1811, composed a poem in which a felled Skye woodland is the narrative voice:

Gun labhair Griamsaig 's a' mhadainn
Gu moch 's i 'teannadh ri seanchas
Gur a lìonmhor m' adhbhar smaointinn
O thàinig orm aois is aimsir
'S beag an t-iongnadh mi bhith tùirseach
'N àm dhomh sùil thoirt air gach taobh dhìom
An colour *a bh'orm ri linn m'òige*
Fàth mo bhròin a bhith as aonais...

Bha mi gu seamragach, duilleach
Gu slinneanach, còmhnard, socair
Ged dh' fhàs mi o chaill mi 'n duilleach
Gu druinneanach, tolmach, slocach
'S iomadh fear nach d' chuir orm fiach
Bha 'g iarruidh gu iathadh umam
B' ann diubh Alastair Mac Hùstain
'S tric a rùisg e pàirt dhe m' dhuillich.

'S iomadh cearcal leathann uinsinn
Thug thu o thùin asam 's cabar
'S ge nach dèan thu 'n-diugh mo chluinntinn
Gun d' fhàg thu cuimhneachan agam
Òganaich a tha 'gam èisteachd
Aithris an sgeula-sa uam-sa
Tha mise 'n deireadh na h-aimsrich
Innis an seanchas mar chual' thu.[242]

Griamsaig said in the morning
Early, when she was turning to discussion
That my causes for reflection are many
Since age and time have come over me
Little wonder that I am sad
When I cast an eye all around me
The colour I had in my youth —
The cause of my grief is to be without it...

I was full of shamrocks and leaves
Broad-shouldered, level, pleasant
Although since I lost my foliage I've become
Humped, full of lumps and pot-holes

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242 Dòmhnall MacLeòid 1811, p. 47-50.

Many a man didn't value me
Who wanted to walk my bounds
One of them was Alastair son of Hugh
Often did he tear away parts of my foliage.

Many a broad circle of ash and caber
Did you remove from my base
And although you won't hear me today
You have left me with memories
Youth who hears me
Relate this tale I tell
I am at the end of my life
Tell the tale as you heard it.

A more natural mode of expression in Gaelic poetry occurs in a song by a survivor of Culloden who fondly recalls his hunting expeditions:

...èirigh gu sunndach
'S dol air ionnsaigh le m' mhòrghath;
Bhiodh a' choill air gach làimh dhomh
Cur deagh-fhàileadh 'nam phòran...[243]

...Rising merrily
And going on an expedition with my spear
The forest would be all around me
Putting an excellent fragrance into my pores...

One quatrain from Duncan Lothian's c. 1710 poem of proverbs apparently compares the man who has lost his wealth to a wilderness without any trees:

Is beag sgoinn de mhòintich am monadh
Is beag sgoinn de choille am fàsach
Is lugha meas tha de dhuine falamh
An uair tha earras an dèidh fhàgail.[244]

The bare hill has little of the peat-bog's value
The wilderness has little of the forest's value
Even less respect does a poor man have
When his wealth has left him.

There is a somewhat puzzling proverb which first appears in a collection of proverbs in one of the manuscripts of the early eighteenth century antiquary Uilleam Mac Mhurchaidh: *'Mol an lom-thìr is na ruig i; dì-mhol a' choille is na trèig i* [Praise the bareland and don't go to it; dispraise the forest and don't leave it].'[245] Close variants appear in Nicolson's collection: *'Mol a m*

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243 John L Campbell 1990, p. 254, 'Òran an déidh Blàr Chuil-Lodair', Iain mac Thearlaich Òig.
244 *BG*, l. 781-4.
245 RC II (Turner MS), p. 502.

monadh is na ruig e; diomoil a' choille 's na fàg i [Praise the moorland and don't go to it; dispraise the forest and don't leave it], *Mol a' mhachair is na treabh; diomoil a' choille is na trèig* [Praise the grassland and don't plow it; dispraise the forest and don't leave it].'

This may refer to the disparity between the common Gaelic ideal of being a warrior and the lower status of working the land.[246] As previously mentioned, the forest was the 'stage' for much of the action of the Gaelic warrior figure: the hunt was to be found in the woods, the heroic figure often slipped into the woods when pursued, romantic encounters with women were under the shelter of trees and Otherworld encounters and unpredictable adventure were characteristic of forest settings. Although farming was a practical and necessary activity to work the land, one has the impression that it was the last choice amongst all possible options of the more heroic-minded Gaelic ethos. Hunting laws, officially banning the use of the forest[247] to the common man, would have made the woods a dangerous place in which to be found by the authorities.

Another sort of tension and disquiet appears in Scottish Gaelic poetry, from the era of the Clearances onwards, in a way that it probably hasn't for thousands of years. A poem by Dòmhnall MacColla[248] begins with a characteristic description of the bard's setting, trees being salient in the description:

Air latha tlus blàth 's mi an sgàth na coille
A' sealltainn gach àit' suas air dà thaobh Loch Seile
Coisir cheòlmhor nan craobh 's iad cho aobhach 's na meangan
'S a' ghrian thar nan sgurr 'togail smùid as an talamh...

On a warm day under the forest's shade
Looking up above at every place on both side of Loch Shiel
Musical choir of the trees, so joyous in the branches
And the sun above the peaks causing a mist to rise from the ground...

Dòmhnall goes on to praise the natural features of the area, the grassy banks, the play of the light upon the trees, sand and water, and so on. It is when he looks down upon the abandoned human habitations that he realises

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246 John MacInnes 1981, p. 157.

247 The hunting forest — not always containing trees — is usually referred to in Gaelic as *frìth*, however.

248 Biographical information in *Tocher* Winter 1980. Born in 1901, raised in Ardnamurchan. The poem 'Taobh Loch Seile' was kindly sent to me by Mr. Hugh Cheape, who was given it by a close relative of the poet. It has also been recently printed in *Tocher* no. 52.

that the communities have become so powerless that nature is reclaiming their hard-earned holdings and trees are commanding the very heart of a home, the fire-place:

Dh'fhalbh iad, na sàir, a bha 'g àiteach an fhearainn
Chan eil 's na lianagan bàn ach ceann-fàth bhith fo smalan
Gach ròd a rinn iad maoth le mòr tharchar 's fallus
An-diugh fo raithneach 's fo fhraoch 's a' chraobh dol 's an teallach.

The stalwart men who worked the land have departed
There is nothing in the fields but a cause for despair
Every road they made smooth with great exertion and sweat
Is today under bracken and heather, with the trees going into the hearth.

While Dòmhnall praises the beauty of nature, he recognises, without explicitly expressing it, that the balance between nature and human civilisation which allows both to co-exist has been broken. Nature is moving back into the homesteads abandoned by the native inhabitants.

The threat posed by wild nature to agricultural society can also be seen in the arcane banter of the poets in the Middle Irish text *Immacallam in dá Thuarad* [The Colloquy of the Two Sages]. To indicate that things are well, the poet Néde answers that 'woods smile... fruit-trees flourish...', but to signify that the order of the world will descend into chaos, he says, amongst other descriptions of social decay, that 'Every great forest will become a great plain; every great plain will become a forest'.[249] In other words, as in the prophecies of many cultures about the total collapse that will accompany an apocalypse, the order created, and depended upon, by humankind, both moral and physical, will become reversed and revert to chaos.

Perhaps this is the message behind one of Coinneach Odhar's prophecies: *'Thig an là 's am bi Alba fhathast fo choill* [The day will come in which Scotland will once again be covered in trees].'[250] Coinneach is credited with a number of prophecies of disasters concerning the Highland people, including the Clearances. Is this a prophecy that Scotland's human civilisation will fail to such an extent that nature will reclaim it, and the Great Caledonian Forest will appear in place of the people? Or is this a prophecy about the establishment of the Forestry Commission, which has indeed carried out a great deal of reforestation on top of villages emptied by the Clearances?

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249 Whitley Stokes 1905, §152, 154, 228.
250 Dòmhnall MacÌomhair 1990, pp. 46-7.

On the other hand, it has been recognised for some time by at least some members of the Gaelic community that trees are a healthy element in the environment, and that their total absence is not desired. Logan, for example, comments in his early nineteenth-century antiquarian work:

> Since Scotland has become so destitute of wood, the pasture has materially suffered. The ground in the Straths, where the ancient woods have decayed, does not now yield a quarter of the grass it did when sheltered by the foliage, and the farmer is not able to outwinter his cattle as formerly; but the bare hills and flats are not abundantly stocked with sheep, the animal whose increase is said to have been the chief reason for the destruction of the young trees, and consequent deterioration of the pasture.[251]

The Gaelic scholar the Rev. Neil Ross wrote an editorial in 1924 in *An Gàidheal* arguing for a better management of woodland resources in the Highlands. Between explanations of the symbolic importance of trees in Gaelic lore, he implores:

> *Is nì ro aimeadach so — beartas nàdarra na dùthcha 'ga chaitheamh, gun mheadhan a chleachdadh a chum feum an fhearainn a chaonadh le bhith a' cur chraobhan òga an àite nan coilltean a thatar a' sonnadh sìos. Chan e 'mhàin gum bheil an dòigh dhona seo a' milleadh maise na tìre ach tha i gu luath a' lughadachadh luach na Gàidhealtachd a thaobh saibhreas nàdarra.*[252]

> This is a very stupid thing — for the the natural wealth of the country to be consumed without any means to protect the utility of the land by planting young trees in the place of the woods that are being hewed down. It's not only that this bad practice is spoiling the beauty of the landscape but it is quickly reducing the value of the Highlands in terms of natural resources.

Chapter Conclusions

From the earliest times, the tree has been literally a central element in Gaelic cosmology. The *Axis Mundi* was often marked in Gaelic tradition by a sacred tree. Trees are to be found in a number of early holy sites in Scotland, often later overlaid by Christian sites attempting to assimilate them. Such was the tenacity of Gaelic folk belief that legends emerged deploying Christian saints to explain their origins and magical functions. The character of these trees and the strength of belief in them made it taboo to utilise their wood into the eighteenth century.

Many aspects of the sacred symbolism of trees can be found throughout the world. The Tree of Life was a potent symbol from earlier civilisations

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251 James Logan 1876, vol II, p. 63.

252 *An Gàidheal* Leabhar XIX, Earrann 9, p. 129.

which had a profound place in the religion of Old Testament Israel and had an ongoing influence upon later Christianity. The image of a Christian Heaven could be described in much the same terms as that of the Gaelic Otherworld, an eternally green, fertile and inexhaustible Paradise. As Eliade explains, the flow of influence between Christianity and the belief systems that it encountered was not necessarily one way:

> But with the spread of Christianity into all the provinces of the Roman Empire, especially after its final triumph under Constantine, there is a gradual change in perspective. The more that Christianity becomes a universalistic religion, the more its historicity recedes into the background... We find the symbols of the Cosmic Tree and of the center of the world incorporated into the symbol of the Cross... In other words, in order to convey the mystery of universal redemption through the Cross, Christian writers used not only the symbols of the Old Testament and the ancient Near East (reference to the Tree of Life) but also the archaic symbols of the Cosmic Tree set at the center of the world and ensuring communication between Heaven and Earth.[253]

Trees were a common feature of royal sites as well, particularly due to the sacred nature of these trees and the connection they established between this world and the Otherworld. This connection made them appropriate places for inaugurations and for maintaining an ongoing relationship between the head of the tribe and the Otherworld powers upon which the success of his reign depended.

The praise of land and social leader was almost inexorably intertwined and the degree of the bounty of the land and the rightness of the leader's rule was to be measured by the signs of nature, most particularly the woodlands. The association of woods, especially noble trees, and place was an indirect but powerful way of expressing the excellence of land and its rightful ruler. Even when the bonds between Gaelic society and its old social elite were loosened, the bonds between homeland and kindred remained and the conventions of Gaelic panegyric could still convey praise or insult to a people according to the manner in which the land's trees were described. Evidence from Ireland also demonstrates that the destruction of woodland could be seen as an attack on the natural order and the social order:

> Since the seventeenth century, there has been an enduring perception of the bareness of the Irish landscape. The great Gaelic lament *Cill Chais* used the cutting of the woodland in South Tipperary as a symbol for the destruction of the whole social order...[254]

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253 Mircea Eliade 1958, pp. 119-120.

254 Aalen, Whelan and Stout 1997, p. 122.

The forest was a powerful symbol in Gaelic culture. It was a source of food and crucial resources, the habitat of heroes and creatures desirable and dangerous, the primordial source of the land's fecundity. As human civilisation evolved and expanded the forests were pushed back, although Gaeldom retained no cultural memory of this slow and piecemeal 'struggle'. Instead, a drama was created to explain how the envy and greed of others brought about the loss of Scotland's cherished Eden.

Poetry and proverbial lore express the ongoing tensions and ambiguities in the relationship between forest and human civilisation. The forest poses a threat to a post-Paleolithic society if it cannot claim a space in it in which to provide basic needs. When the balance between Gaelic civilisation and 'wild nature' can be healthily maintained, however, a more positive image emerges in which the archaic symbols of ancient Gaelic thought are expressed.

Conclusions

Humans and Trees

It is abundantly manifest from all evidence that Gaels, like other native peoples, formulated their understanding of the tree in relation to humankind itself. That is, the tree and the forest were not merely contemplated for their own sake in the abstract, detached from human existence, but by comparison with humankind and in accordance to human life and society. This is an almost tautological statement, for human culture develops myths and ideologies in order to understand the otherwise mysterious or chaotic universe,[1] and the origin and role of humankind in the grand cosmological scheme is central to such myth-making.

This does not imply that all cosmology places humankind at the top of a hierarchy for which nature is subservient, it merely means that the 'identity crisis' of human existence must be resolved in a way that explains, and even justifies, the way in which each culture is related to and exploits its environment.

Chapter One explored the multi-faceted symbolism that relates humans and trees. The parallelism existing in Gaelic terminology for trees and humans demonstrates the awareness of a kinship between humans and trees such as can be found in many other primal cultures around the world. Trees are arguably the most prominent and important natural category exploited in Gaelic literature.

I have already suggested some of the similarities and parallelisms between trees and humans in the Introduction: our physical shape; our elevated status amongst our respective biological classes, flora and fauna; our resemblance to ancestors; and so on. The works of the Gaelic poets explored in Chapters One and Two suggested other ideas: good trees and responsible human leaders provide shelter; a human can be 'rooted' in a particular locale, like a tree; a human can have the shape, smell or taste of a tree or tree-fruit; and so on. Trees thus provide one large and multi-faceted body of symbolism available to Gaelic poets from the Natural world.

Trees can be understood in terms of what they provide for humankind. They draw power up from the depths, made manifest at the holy wells where

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[1] Max Oelschlaeger 1991, pp. 9-13; Jaan Puhvel 1987, p. 2.

humans can find healing waters. They can be planted to commemorate people or events. They supply food and shelter.

There are certainly ways in which trees surpass humanity, however. Many of them outlast humans and the oak in particular seemed revered for its extreme old age. The Gaelic lore explored in Chapter Three suggested that people could hardly conceive of a time when there would not be any trees. A particular tree might determine the fate of a person, a family or a whole clan.

Traditional Gaelic lore reflects the concern that one be respectful of particular trees or else calamity, even death, could result. One had to know the proper usage of trees, so that the correct type of wood was used in ritual and in 'mundane' life.

Trees had a special role in the cosmological scheme of things which humankind wanted to ally themselves with and thus gain some of the power and prestige of trees. The tribe inaugurated its *rìgh* at the site of a *bile;* the new-born baby's first food was the sap of the ash; at least some ancient Gaelic dynasties claimed descent from tree-beings and some people were named after trees; some later clans identified themselves with the use of tree leaves; leaders enjoyed being favourably compared to the *bile* and to noble trees; and so on. Even the early Christian church tried to assimilate the prestige and power of sacred tree sites by establishing Christian centres near them.

Trees and their produce provide some of the basic resources of life: food, shelter and tools. But wood also gives humankind access to the sea, a kind of mastery over an alien element. In the form of weapons, it helped one group of people master another.

The virtues inherent in trees and wood also give humankind access to and influence over the unseen world: they can be used as protection against the capricious *sìthe* or the malevolent *ban-bhuidseach;* they can be used in spells and charms; their state can be observed to understand the passing of time and the changing of the weather.

The tenacious belief in the Ancient Caledonian Forest, and the explanation of its destruction by enemies to the detriment of its inhabitants, reflects how deeply the symbol of the tree has affected the Scottish psyche. Despite the recognition of the pure and primal energies in woodlands, the agricultural revolution introduced a new perception of the environment and brought about an on-going tension between the primal 'wilderness' — often expressed in terms of woodlands — and the human-dominated landscape.

The role and image of woodlands in Scottish Gaelic literature and tradition is on the balance a very positive one.

Progress made in this thesis

This thesis has attempted to advance the understanding of trees in Scottish Gaelic literature and folklore by making a comprehensive survey of available material and making a systematic analysis of the themes, symbols and images which appear in this material. These elements have then been interpreted in the light of literary conventions, comparative religion and environmental context.

While John MacInnes has earlier pointed out a number of examples of the role of the tree in the Gaelic Panegyric Code I have broken this down into its many aspects and demonstrated how these aspects can be applied not only to individuals but to families, clans and the Gaels as a whole. I have also pointed out how some of these conventions even carry over into the praise and dispraise of non-human items, such as ships and land.

I have attempted to discuss how aspects of tree symbolism can illuminate our understanding of Gaelic cosmology. Trees are a particularly common manifestation of the *axis mundi* in Gaelic cosmology, and whether or not this is the precise intention for them at inaugural sites and royal seats of power, they certainly seem in such cases to act as a link to Otherworld powers. I have also suggested that the Tree of Life ultimately informs such symbolism as the verdant woodland of the Otherworld and trees associated with wells and saints. Other important concepts, displaying parallelism between human society and the natural world, have also been discussed, particularly the poles of noble - non-noble and praise - dispraise.

I have also attempted to relate the style and content of a number of pieces of Scottish Gaelic literature to their environmental settings, analysing the extent to which the literature is a naturalistic and realistic depiction of the landscape of the Gàidhealtachd rather than the exploitation of highly stylised literary formulae sometimes more natural to the Irish 'motherland'. In brief, while conventions and patterns of thought are undoubtedly moulded by this high register Irish literary tradition, vernacular Scottish Gaelic shows many signs of being rooted in the Scottish landscape. This is particularly true in the case of the poets intimate with the forested landscape, who tend to use a

much greater variety of named tree types and their characteristics than the poets who are fixed in a more barren landscape.

Regardless of the extent of tree cover, however, the symbolism of the tree is one of great power and evocativeness, rooted in the primal significance of the Tree of Life. Flourishing woodland suggests prosperity and just rule by the social leader. The tension between humanised landscape and wild nature has often been expressed in terms of tree imagery, as has the nostalgia for the 'pre-agri-*culture*' of the Great Caledonian Forest.

Although an analysis of Scottish Gaelic literature and tradition reveals a great number of parallels with cultures from around the world, it is clear that these can only be understood properly from an internal frame of reference. Human-tree parallelism works at the level of the lexicon of the language itself; tree symbolism in Gaelic panegyric is interconnected with the values and conventions of the matrix of Gaelic culture; the image of the *bile* is shaped by the practices and customs specific to the Gaelic institution of kingship; the associations of the apple and hazel are largely influenced by the weather conditions and economy of the Gaelic world; the old-growth forests of oak have created an association between the oak and antiquity in Gaelic tradition; and so on.

Further Research

While this thesis has made a significant contribution to the field, it also suggests a number of possible lines of inquiry for further research. Future scholars may wish to tackle similar stores of metaphors: animals, landscape features, the elements, and so on.

While I have demonstrated that many of the aspects of trees in Scottish Gaelic literature and tradition can be explained as developments of Irish Gaelic literature and tradition, there are also significant differences. So far as I have been able to ascertain, the hazel nut does not appear in Scottish Gaelic sources as the food of wisdom and inspiration as it does in Irish sources. This may be because this association is too closely tied to the well of Segais and that properties specific to the sacred mythic topography of Ireland do not always translate to the Scottish setting. Other differences seem to emerge from diverging political developments. Keeping such differences in mind, future research might tell us a great deal about the development of literature and

culture in the two 'culture regions' and suggest how dependent and/or independent Scotland was from Ireland from this point of view.

I believe that I have also made some suggestions about how future research might take the landscape and natural environment, in physical, metaphorical and onomastic aspects, into account when scrutinising the cultural developments of the Gàidhealtachd. I have shown, for example, that the selection of clan badges drew upon a number of different available options, from choosing flora indicative of a region to making onomastic puns.

While this thesis has made tentative steps toward understanding two aspects of the Gaelic belief system — noble - non-noble and *beannaichte - crosda* — future research could delve into these and other categories as they apply to the totality of life in the old Gaelic world.

My examination of poetry and oral tradition concerning economic development and forestry exploitation suggests a wider and more comprehensive study which could make use of Gaelic literature to guage the reaction of the Gaelic community to the changes effected in the post-Culloden period.

While the symbolism of the tree is an astonishingly pervasive and enduring one throughout the history of Gaelic literature, it, along with many other time-honoured conventions in Gaelic tradition, has had to compete with international literary styles and fashions in the twentieth century. Future research might investigate the continuities and innovations in twentieth century Gaelic literature using criteria and techniques such as those in this thesis.

A great deal of research regarding the influence of Brittonic language and culture in the development of Scottish Gaelic language and culture still needs to be done, and there are some interesting questions raised in this thesis which such research might resolve. Is the extension of the term *abhall* to mean 'an orchard' due to Brittonic influence? Were many of the Christian churches established by Gaelic missionaries in Pictland settled next to pre-existing sacred trees, and how does the place-name evidence reflect this?

Appendices

Appendix A — Craobh nan Ubhal

Carmina Gadelica vol. V, pp. 2-5

Bho Mhòir Nic Nèill (Mòr nighean Alasdair mhic Ruairidh Bhàin), coitear, Ceann Tangabhal, Barraidh. 8mh de'n Mhàirt 1869.

Chraobh nan ubhal
Gheug nan ubhal
Chraobh nan ubhal
Abhal ubhlan.

Nuair a thèid thu 'n coill 'ga rùsgadh
Aithnich fèin a' chraobh as liums' ann
Chraobh as buige 's as mìls ùbhlan
A' chraobh gheugnach pheurach ùbhlach
Bun a' fàs 's a barr a' lùbadh.

Tha craobh eile agam 's a' Chreig Uaine
Craobh eile 'n ursainn a' gharraidh;
Nam biodh Mac Aoidh anns an làthair
No Niall anbharrach a bhràthair
Cha bhiodh mo thochradh-sa gun phàigheadh
Le crodh-laoigh 's le aighean-dàire
Le caoirich dhubha agus bhàna
Le gearrain gu dèanamh àitich.

'S e Mac Aoidh an duine treubhach
Nì e sìoda de'n chlòimh Chèitein
Nì e sròl de'n fhraoch nam b' fheudar
Nì e fion de uisge an t-slèibhe.

'S e Mac Aoidh an duine buadhmhor
Nì e an cruadhchadh gun chonnadh
'S ann l'a dhuirn a nì e phronnadh.

'S e Mac Aoidh a' chòtain eangaich
Nach iarradh an t-earradh troma
Marcaiche nan eachaibh donna
Chuireadh crùidhean òir fo'm bonnaibh
Coisiche nan talamh toll.

Mo ghaol, mo ghràdh an t-òg euchdail
Reachainn leat troimh choille gheugaich
Chumainn is dh'fhuaighinn do lèine
Le snàthaid chaoil 's le snàth glè-gheal;
Nighinn a-rithist 'na dhèidh sin
Air lic shleamhainn abhainn ghlèghlain;
Thiormaichinn air bharr nan geug i
Chuirinn paisgt' an làimh do phèid i.

Chraobh nan ubhal, gun robh Dia leat
Gun robh gile, gun robh grian leat
Gun robh gaoth an ear 's an iar leat
Gun robh gach nì a thàinig riamh leat
Gun robh gach mathas agus miann leat
Gun robh Brighid agus Brèanainn leat[1]
Gun robh Somhairle mòr 's a chliar leat
Gun robh gach neach mar tha mi fhìn leat.

Mo ghaol, mo ghràidh, an t-òg beadrach
Dhannsadh lùthmhor sunndach aigneach
Am barr nam beann bhiomaid aighreach
Am bràigh nan gleann bhiomaid ...
Am bun nam beann bhiomaid ...
Air bharr nan tonn bhiomaid ...

From Marion MacNeil (daughter of Alexander son of Fair Roderick), cottar, Ceann Tangabhal, Barra. 8th March 1869.

O apple tree,
O apple branch
O apple tree
Tree of apples.

When you go to the wood to strip it
Recognise the tree which is mine there
The tree of the softest and sweetest apples
The branching pear-like tree of apples
Its roots growing and its top bending.

I have another tree in the Green Rock
Another tree close to the garden gate;
If Mackay were there
Or great Neil his brother
My dower would not be unpaid
With milch cows and heifers in calf
With black-faced and white sheep
And with geldings for ploughing.

Mackay is the strenuous man
He makes silk from May wool
He makes satin of heather if necessary
He makes wine from mountain water.

Mackay is the talented man
He dries grain without fuel
With his own fists he beats it.

Mackay of the gusseted coat

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[1] On the advice of Mr. Ronald Black, I have changed the original, which was: *Gun robh gach bhrioghais agus briain leat.*

Would not want heavy armour
Rider of the chestnut horses
Who would put golden shoes on their hooves
Walker of the broken earth.

My dear, my love is the valient youth
I'd go through the branched forest with you
I'd fashion and sew your shirt
With slender needle and pure-white thread;
I would wash it after that
On a slippery slab of a pure river
I would dry it on the tips of branches
I would put it folded into your page's hand.

O apple tree, may God be with you
May the moon and the sun be with you
May the east wind and west wind be with you
May every thing that ever was be with you
May every bounty and desire be with you
May Brigit and Brendan be with you
May great Somerled and his sages be with you
May every one, like myself, be with you.

Mo dear, my love, is the playful youth
Who would dance spritely merrily spiritedly
On the mountain tops we would be merry
On the brae of glens we would be ...
At the base of mountains we would be ...
On the waves' crest we would be ...

Carmina Gadelica vol. V, pp. 6-9

Is i a leannan a rinn an t-òran seo do Mhac Aoidh na Ranna, ann an Ìle.

Chraobh nan ubhal, gheug nan ubhal
Ò Chraobh nan ubhal o ho
Chraobh nan ubhal, abhall ùrail
Ò Chraobh nan ubhal o ho.

Chraobh nan ubhal, gun robh Dia leat
Gun robh gealach, gun robh gealach leat
Gun robh gaoth an ear 's an iar leat
Gun robh Dùile mòr nan sian leat
Gun robh gach nì thàna riamh leat
Gun robh Somhairle Mòr 's a chliar leat.

Tha craobh agam 's a' Chreag einich
Craobh eile 's doras a' gharraidh.

'N uair a thèid thu 'n coill 'ga rùsgadh
Aithnich fhèin a' chraobh as liumsa ann
A' chraobh gheugach pheurach ùbhlach
Bun an sàs 's a barr a' lùbadh

Chraobh as buige 's as mìlse ùbhlan.

'S e Mac Aoidh an duine buadhar
Nì e an cruadhchadh gun chonnadh
'S ann le chasan nì e chalgadh (?),
'S ann le fearg a nì e phronnadh.

S e Mac Aoidh an duine treubhach
Nì e sìoda de'n chlòimh Chèitein
Nì e fion de uisge an t-slèibhe
'S nì e ìm de'n chobhar ghlè-gheal.

Nam biodh Mac Aoidh 's an làthair
No Niall anbharrach a bhràthair
Cha bhiodh mo thochar gun phàigheadh
Bhiodh crodh-laoigh 's le aighean-dàire ann
Bhiodh caoirich dhubh' agus bhàn' ann
Bhiodh gearrain ann gu dèanadh àitich
'S bhiodh gobhair ann a' dol gu fàsaich.

'S e Mac Aoidh a' chòtain eangaich
Marcaiche nan eachaibh donna
Marcaiche nan steudaibh seanga
Chuireadh crùidhean òir fo'm bonna
Choisich an talamh toll.

Mo ghaol, mo ghràdh an t-òg beadrach
Dhannsadh eutrom rìoghail aigneach
Air bharr nan tonn bhiomaid beudrach (?)
Fo bhun nan beann bhiomaid togarrach.

Mo ghaol, mo ghràdh an t-òg feuchant
Tha muigh fo choill mhòr nan geugan
Rachainn leat thar chuan na h-Èireann.

It was his sweetheart who made this song for Mackay of the Rinns in Islay.

O apple tree, O apple branch
O apple tree o ho
O apple tree, o flourishing apple tree
O apple tree o ho.

O Apple tree, may God be with you
May the moon and the sun be with you
May the east wind and west wind be with you
May the great Creator of the elements be with you
May every thing that ever was be with you
May great Somerled and his sages be with you.

I have a tree in the Fowling (?) Rock
And another tree in the garden gate.

When you go to the wood to strip it
Recognise the tree which is mine there

The branching pear-like tree of apples
Its base rooted and its top bending
The tree of the softest and sweetest apples.

Mackay is the talented man
He dries grain without fuel
It's with his feet he removed the awns (?)
It's with anger he bruises it.

Mackay is the strenuous man
He makes silk from May wool
He makes wine from mountain water.
And he makes butter of the pure-white foam.

If MacKay were here
Or great Neil his brother
My dower would not be unpaid
There would be milch-cows and heifers in calf
There would be black-faced and white sheep
There would be geldings for ploughing
And goats would be going to pasture.

Mackay of the gusseted coat
Is the rider of the chestnut horses
Is the rider of the slender steeds
Who would put golden shoes on their hooves
Who walked the broken earth.

My dear, my love is the playful youth
Who would dance lightly royally spiritedly
On the waves' top we would be sportive
At the mountains' base we would be cheerful.

Mo dear, my love is the splendid youth
Who is out in the great branching wood
I would go with you over the Irish Sea.

Hebridean Folksongs vol. i, Donald MacCormick, 1893, South Uist

'S e Mac Aoidh an duine treubhach
Nì e sìoda de'n cloimh cheutaich
Nì e fion a dh'uisg' an t-slèibhe
Copanan dearg air a' chrèadhaich
Lìon air bhàrr an fhraoich nam b'fheudar
Muileann air gach sruthan slèibhe
Tobar fion air bhruaich gach fèithe
Caisteal air gach cnoc 's leis fhèin 'ad.

'S e Mac Aoidh a' chòtain eangaich
Nach iarradh an t-earradh trom
Chuireadh coisiche 'na dheannaibh
Mharcraicheadh an t-each 'na dheann.

Nam biodh Mac Aoidh 's an àite
No Niall anabharrach a bhràthair
Cha bhiodh mo thochradh gun phàigheadh
Bhiodh crodh-laoigh ann 's aighean dàra
'S na seasgaich air chùl a' gharraidh.

Mo ghaol fhìn an cùirteir feucannt
'S tric a thog 'ad oirnn na breugan
Far nach biomaid fhìn 'gan èisdeachd.

Mo ghaol 's mo ghràdh an t-òg beadarrach
Dhannsadh gu grinn lùthmhor aigeanntach
Air ùrlar gum biomaid suigeanta
Air chnoc àrd gum biomaid beadarrach.

'S math thig dhut an deise chothlamaidh
'S lèine chaol de'n anart Ghailmhinn
Clogad cruadhach 's suaicheantas dearg ort
'S paidhir mhath phiostal air chrios nam ball airgid.

Chraobh nan ubhal, gheug nan abhal
Chraobh nan ubhal, gun robh Dia leat
Gun robh Moire 's gun robh Crìosda
Gun robh ghealach, gun robh ghrian leat
Gun robh gaoth an ear 's an iar leat
Gun robh m' athair fhìn 's a thriall leat

Ach ma thèid thu do'n choill' iùbhraich
Aithnich fhèin a' chraobh as liumsa
Chraobh as mìlse 's as buig' ùbhlan
Chraobh mheanganach pheurach ùbhlach
Bun a' fàs 's a barr a' lùbadh
'S a meangannan air gach tùbh dhi
Ùbhlan troma donna dlùthmhor

Ach ma thèid thu 'na choill' fhiosraich
Foighnich a' chraobh am bi mise
Chraobh a thilg a barr 's a miosan
Chraobh a thilg a peighinn phisich.

MacKay is the vigourous man
He makes silk from the lovely wool
He makes wine from the hillside water
Ruddy cups from the clay
Linen on the heather tops, if needed,
A mill on every hillside rivulet
A well of wine on the bank of every bog
A castle on every hillock, and they are his.

It is MacKay of the cornered short-coat
Who wouldn't want the heavy apparel
He would send the walker off in a rush
He would ride the horse in a gallop.

If MacKay was in (this) place
Or excellent Neil his brother
My dowry would be paid
There would be calves and heifers
And the fattenning cattle beyond the village.

My own true love is the (?) courtier
Often did they tell lies about us
Where we couldn't hear them.

My dear and my darling is the playful youth
Who would dance neatly, nimbly, lively
On the floor we would play
On a high hill we would flirt.

Clothing of woof suits you well
And a slender shirt of Galway linen
An iron helmet with a red favour
And a good pair of pistols on belt of silver studs.

O tree of the apples, o branch of apple trees
O tree of the apples, may God be with you
May Mary and may Christ be with you
May the moon and may the sun be with you
May the wind of east and west be with you
May my own father and his means be with you.

But if you go into the yew forest
Recognise the tree that belongs to me
Tree of the sweetest and tenderest apples
Branchy, appled tree, full of pears,
Trunk growing and the top bowing
And its branches on each side of it
Heavy, brown, dense apples

But if you go to the tended orchard
Seek the tree in which I will be
The tree that cast its leaf and fruit
The tree that cast the lucky coin.

Gaelic Folksongs from Barra, Ruairi Iain Bhàin, 1938

Chraobh nan ubhal, gheug nan abhal
O chraobh nan ubhal, o ho

Nuair thèid thu 'na choill' 'ga rùsgadh
Aithnich a' chraobh am bi mise
Chraobh as milse 's as buig' ùbhlan.

Chraobh nan ubhal, gheug nan abhal
Chraobh nan ubhal, gun robh Dia leat
Gun robh gealach agus grian leat;

Craobh nan ubhal, gheug nan abhal
Gun robh 'n àird an ear 's an iar leat
Gun robh Mac Cumhaill 's an Cliar leat.

S e Mac Aoidh an duine buadhmhor
Chraobh nan ubhal, gheug nan abhal
Nì e cruadhachadh gun chonnadh
'S ann le 'dhùirn a nì e phronnadh.

Chraobh nan ubhal, gheug nan abhal
'S e Mac Aoidh a' chòtain sheangaich
Lean an còta sin o shean ris.

Chraobh nan ubhal, gheug nan abhal
O chraobh nan ubhal, o ho.

O Apple tree, o apple branch
O Apple tree, o ho.

When you go to the wood to strip it
Recognise the tree where I am
The tree of the sweetest, softest apples.

O apple tree, o apple branch
O apple tree, may God be with you
May the moon and sun be with you.

O apple tree, o apple branch
May the east and west be with you
May MacCumhaill and the sages be with you.

Mackay is the talented man
O apple tree, o apple branch
He hardens corn without fuel
It's with his fists he bruises it.

O apple tree, o apple branch
It is Mackay of the slender coat
That coat stayed with him of old.

O apple tree, o apple branch
O apple tree, o ho.

Tocher vol. 2, Calum Johnston, 1954, Barra

O chraobh nan ubhal o ho
Chraobh nan ubhal, gheug nan abhall.

Tha craobh agam an Creag Aoine
Tha tè eile an Creag Iana.

Chraobh nan ubhal, gun robh Dia leat
Gun robh gealach 's gun robh grian leat
Gun robh 'n àird an ear 's an iar leat
'S gun robh gach buaidh a bh' ann riamh leat.

'S nuair thèid thu do'n choill 'ga rùsgadh
Aithnich fhèin a' chraobh tha lium-sa
Chraobh is buige 's misl' ùbhlan
Am bun a' fàs 's a barr a' lùbadh.
Chraobh nan ubhal, gheug nan abhall.

O apple tree, o ho
O apple tree, o branch of apple-trees.

I have a tree on Creag Aoine
I have another on Creag Iana.

O apple tree, may God be with you
May the moon and sun be with you
May the east and west be with you
May every power there was be with you.

When you go to the wood to strip it
Recognise the tree that's mine
Tree of the softest, sweetest apples
The trunk growing and the top bending
O apple tree, o branch of apple-trees.

Eilean Fraoich p. 61

O chraobh nan ubhal ò
Chraobh nan ubhal, geug nan abhull
O, chraobh nan ubhal ò

Tha craobh agam anns a' leas
Tha i 'fàs gu dìreach bras
Thig mo leannan 'ga toirt ás
'S aithnichidh e cò chraobh is leamsa
Craobh is mìlse 's is feàrr ùbhlan
Craobh is duinne 's truime ùbhlan
'S bheir e leis mi fhìn air leth
'S e mi fhìn a bheir e leis.

O apple tree, ò
O apple tree, branch of the apple trees
O, o apple tree ò

I have a tree in the garden
It is growing straight and healthy
My sweetheart will come to take it out
He will recognise which tree is mine
The tree with the sweetest and best apples

The tree with the heaviest, brownest apples
And he will take me away
And it's me he will take with him.

Appendix B —Am Meangan

This song was composed by Margaret Cameron, born at the farm of Clashgour, Glen Orchy. Her father's name was Peter Campbell. Her first husband was Angus McIntyre, a native of Lochaber, and after his death she married a Mr. Cameron in Fort William. She seems to have retired in Callander.[2]

She produced a book of Gaelic poetry entitled *Òrain Nuadh Ghàidhealach* which was published in 1785, but her poem *Am Meangan* does not appear in it. It appears in the book of hymns edited by an t-Urramach Gilleasbuig MacCaluim, and five verses of it appear, with the melody, in Francis Tolmie's appendix to *The Gesto Collection*, where she credits Dr. Alasdair MacDonald as her informant.

Bho bhonn Iesse bhrist amach
Am Faillein gasda, ùr;
Fìor chrann uaine, taghta, luachmhor
'S airidh e air cliù;
Meangan uasal, torach, buadhmhor
'S e gach uair fo dhrùchd
A ghèugan dosrach sìnte suas
'S iad tarraing uaithe sùigh.

So an Crann am measg nan crann
Air àrdachadh gu mòr
Faillein sùghmhor, maiseach, cùbhraidh
Taitneach, ùrar, òg;
Àlainn, ciatach, 's e mo sgèimheach
Miannaicht' air gach dòigh
Gun fheachd' no fiaradh, ruaidh' no crìonadh
Gun ghaoid, gun ghiamh, gun ghò.

Meangan prìseil, miann na frìthe
'S e gu dìreach 'fàs
E air sìneadh mach a ghèugan
'S iad gu lèir fo bhlàth;
Nach mothaich tart ri àm an teas
Nach searg 's nach seac gu bràth
Aig uisge sèimh tha e a' tàmh
'S cha tiormaich meud an tràsg'.

Tha abhainn fhìorghlan 'ruith m'a chrìochaibh

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[2] Information from *The Northern Chronicle*, April 26, 1882.

De'n fhìor-uisg' shoilleir, bheò
'Cur subhachais an cridh' gach aoin
A gheabh dhi taom r'a òl;
Tha slàint' as ùr na 'dhuillich chùbhraidh
Dh'anam brùit' fo leòn;
Beatha 's ìoc-shlàint dhoibhs' fo 'n iargain;
'S dream gun lùths gheabh treòir.

Meangan cliùiteach 's e air lùbadh
Le ùr-mheas chum an làir
Toirt toraidh thruim gach àm 's a' bhliadhn'
'S gu sìorruidh a' toirt fàis;
Tha e bhrìoghmhor 's mòr a mhìlseachd
Do gach linn is àl;
'S gach eun tha glan am measg na coill
Gheibh iad fo'n chraoibh seo sgàil.

Crann ro thaitneach 'sgaoil ro fharsaing
Mach o chuan gu cuan;
'S ann fo 'sgàile gheabhar fasgadh
Taitneach do luchd-cuairt.
Tha 'àirde ruigheachd chum nan nèamh
'S thar nèamh nan nèamh a bhuaidh
Tha mhaise 's àilleachd a' toirt barr
Air gach crann dh'fhàsas suas.

Crann ro bhrìoghar e da-rìreadh
Bho'n sruth mìltean buaidh;
Nas mils' gu mòr na 'mhil 's na cìribh
Tha 'n ìoc-shlaint a thig uaith;
Tha sruithean sòlais ruith gach lò uaith;
Do'n anam leòinte, thruagh,
'S na h-uile h-aon a nì dhiubh òl
Bidh aca sòlas buan.

Crann ro luachmhor, nach gabh gluasad
'S nach luaisg an doinionn àrd;
Cha dean stoirm a fhrèumhan fhuasgladh
'S cha chaill e 'shnuadh no 'bhlàth.
E suidhichte air slèibhtibh Isreil
Le làimh an Ti is Àird';
'S cha tèid am feasd a ghearradh sìos
No chaoidh a spìon' as 'àit'.

An crann is rìomhach o'n stoc is rìoghail'
Tha 's an fhrìth a' fàs;
Gach crann 's an fhrìth a' tarraing brìgh uaith
Neirt is sùigh gach là;
Fo dhubh'r a ghèugan gheabh na fèumaich
Beatha, rèite, 's blàths;
Fo sgàil a thròcair thig gach seòrsa
'S bidh iad beò gu bràth.

'S e 'n sgeul is prìseil' chaidh riamh innseadh

'S e na fhìrinn bhuain
Gur e an tì so Righ nan Rìghrean
Sìth is glòir a shluaigh;
Strìochdaidh cinnich dhà is trèubhan
'S bheir fo ghèill gach sluagh
Is slòigh nan nèamhan bheir gu lèir dhà
Urram 's gèill bhith-bhuan.

From Jesse's trunk appeared
The fine young shoot
The precious, green, chosen true branch
He deserves praise;
A noble fertile triumphant branch
Dewy for ever
His leafy branches stretched upwards
Drawing moisture from them.

This is the branch amongst branches
Greatly exalted
A sappy elegant fragrant branch
Pleasant, fresh, young;
Beautiful, handsome, he is my handsome one
Desirable in every way
Without contortion, defect or withering
Stainless, faultless, honourable.

Precious branch, darling of the forest
Growing straight
Stretching his branches outward
Which are entirely in flower;
Which don't notice thirst during the heat
Which never dry up or wither
He dwells at calm water
And won't dry up despite dearth.

A pure stream runs around his bounds
Of pure clear living water
Putting cheer in the heart of everyone
Who takes takes a drink from it;
Renewed health is in his fragrant leaves
For the battered wounded soul;
Life and healing for those in pain;
And listless people will find strength.

Renowned branch which is bent
Towards the ground with fresh fruit
Giving a heavy harvest all year long
And eternally giving growth;
He is excellent, his sweetness is great
To every generation and race;
And every bird in the wood that is pure
Will find shade beneath this tree.

Very pleasing branch which spread so wide

Outwards from sea to sea
It is under his shade that shelter is found
Pleasing shelter for travellers.
His height reaches to the heavens
And his virtue excells the heaven of heavens
His beauty excells
Every tree that grows upward.

Excellent tree he is truly
From whom stream thousands of virtues;
Far sweeter than honey in combs
Is the medicine that comes from him;
Streams of solace run from him daily;
For the wounded, wretched soul
And every one who drinks from them
They will have lasting solace.

Priceless branch that cannot be moved
And which the high gale does not toss.
No storm can untie his roots
And he won't lose his flower or colour.
He is situated on the slopes of Israel
By the hand of the Highest One;
And he will never be cut down
Or ever be rooted out.

The beautiful branch from the most royal stock
That grows in the forest;
Every tree in the forest draws essence from him
And strength and moisture every day;
Under the shadow of his branches the needy
Will get life, warmth and comfort;
Under the shade of his mercy all kinds come
And they will be alive forever.

The most precious story ever told
And it is the eternal truth —
That this one is the King of Kings
The peace and glory of his host;
Races will submit to him
And he will defeat every host
And the heavenly hosts will give to him
Complete honour and eternal submission.

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